

ABSTRACT

FROM INFANCY TO MATURITY:

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES OF NAZARENE CHURCHES

by

Anthony M. Sparrow

Babies are a beautiful part of the journey of life and transformation. Anyone would be concerned if a baby did not continue to grow and immediate intervention would be sought to help the baby experience the growth needed in order to continue and thrive. Fortunately, the medical field is available to assist in helping babies when growth is not happening as it should. Spiritual babies are harder to detect. However, many churches are filled with spiritual babies in the church in North America. This is not a bad thing unless the spiritual babies stay in infancy and do not move onto a mature faith. As this research project shows, many churches in North America are filled with spiritual babies who are stuck in infancy. The works of Greg Ogden, Stephen Rankin, and Daniel Louw inform this work.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of discipleship practices and environments used in Nazarene churches in Middle Tennessee according to the perspective of the pastors of these churches. Thirty pastors in the Middle Tennessee area participated by filling out a 20-question survey on discipleship in their current ministry setting. Sixteen of the thirty pastors also participated in a 60-minute face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.

The research project yielded great insight into effective discipleship practices as well as a diversity of barriers to discipleship that pastors struggle to overcome. One of the

most common barriers to discipleship faced by these pastors was a lack of desire in parishioners to want to grow spiritually. Conversely, the most effective practice to help people grow spiritually was to get people serving, especially outside the walls of the church. While there was delineation between discipleship practices and discipleship environments in the survey and interview questions, people reported that small groups of approximately 10-12 people were the most fruitful environments for cultivating spiritual growth.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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by

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF the PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter identifies discipleship and spiritual growth in the context of a local church as the main concern of this project. It communicates the purpose of the project as well as lists questions guiding the research. Key themes are also shared that will be important in fully engaging the topic at hand.

Autobiographical Introduction

I have been serving a local church in Old Hickory, Tennessee for the past three and a half years. Early on in my tenure, I discovered that there was a lack of spiritual leaders among the parishioners of the church. Not only was there a lack of spiritual leadership in the church, there was also an overwhelming sense of spiritual complacency.

Many of the parishioners are long-term church members, and I had discovered that many of them were what the Apostle Paul might call spiritual infants. I started asking myself, “How does this happen in a church? How are so many people still infants in the faith?” Many of the long-term members who were spiritual infants were highly committed to church attendance, and so I was concerned by what I saw. Clearly, a high commitment to Sunday morning worship attendance and going to church programs including Sunday night worship and Wednesday night fellowship/discipleship did not necessarily equate to spiritual growth.

Active membership did not necessarily mean spiritual vitality. As the pastor, I began asking several parishioners if what I was sensing was an accurate description of the

spiritual level of our church people. The responses I received were confirmation that I was assessing our church accurately.

If church participation in the various weekly ministries did not necessarily lead to spiritual growth, I wanted to reach some conclusions of what actually does lead people to spiritual growth and maturity. I began asking the question, “What helps people grow in their walk with Christ?” I started by preaching a sermon series on our mission statement of “leading people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.” I then preached a series this past year on what it means to be a follower of Jesus, which was then followed by another nine-week series on the fruit of the Spirit. If faithful worship attendance did not necessarily equate to spiritual growth, I was under no illusion that hearing sermons on a regular basis would somehow be what really helped people grow. However, I worked with a conviction that I still have today that the proclamation of the word of God is an essential tool in helping people grow spiritually. I knew that there had to be more than just preaching about it.

While preaching the series on the fruit of the Spirit, I began to sense that I was engaging a critical component to spiritual growth. The fruit of the Spirit is a measuring rod of spiritual growth. To know that we are growing, our lives should bear evidence of growth. There must be some kind of manifestation, evidence, or criteria by which we can assess growth. If we are growing spiritually, then we should be growing in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit is in no way exhaustive as Paul includes compassion and humility in another list in Colossians. However, the fruit of the Spirit as laid out in Galatians 5:23

was and is an excellent place to start when measuring spiritual growth in the lives of disciples.

So, I came to this topic of wanting to know how to help people grow spiritually, and I realized that in order for anyone to know whether or not they grew spiritually or helped another person grow spiritually, spiritual growth has to be able to be measured. There has to be a measuring rod or a set of criteria by which one is evaluated and/or evaluates oneself.

Statement of the Problem

What has happened at Old Hickory Church of the Nazarene is not contextually specific to that church. Many authors have suggested that the problem at Old Hickory Church of the Nazarene is happening in many churches, especially within the United States. There is a pandemic in North American churches; most Christians are not being disciplined well. Greg Ogden in his work, *Transforming Discipleship*, quotes columnist Cal Thomas as saying, “ ‘The problem in our culture...isn’t the abortionists. It isn’t the pornographers or drug dealers or criminals. It is the undisciplined, undisciplined, disobedient, and Biblically ignorant Church of Jesus Christ’ ” (23).

If Ogden and Thomas are accurate in their assessments, most churches are struggling with the reality seen at Old Hickory Church of the Nazarene. George Barna says, “ ‘Relatively small numbers of born again adults said their churches gives them the specific paths to follow to foster growth...Only one out of every five believers stated that their church has some means of facilitating an evaluation of the spiritual maturity or commitment to maturity of their congregation’ ” (Ogden 54). It is clear that there is no one party to fault for the discipleship malaise of North American churches, but it is clear

that the church has failed to adequately help people grow in their relationship with Christ. While Ogden points to eight causes, the eighth is particularly important in overcoming the problem. Ogden says, “The eighth and final cause of the low estate of discipleship is that most Christians have never been personally disciplined” (54). As the researcher has interacted with parishioners over the past three years, this eighth and final cause stated by Ogden has been true for most of them. When asked, “Can you name three to five people who have really shaped you and helped you become the disciple that you are today,” the most often repeated response was, “I am not sure that I can name that many.” Sadly, many had a hard time naming one person. Most of these of these parishioners have not been personally disciplined.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of discipleship practices in Nazarene Churches in Middle Tennessee, which is part of the MidSouth District Church of the Nazarene.

Research Questions

The following questions were designed to guide this research project:

Research Question 1: How is discipleship and the goal of discipleship understood by pastors of Nazarene churches on the MidSouth District Church of the Nazarene?

Research Question 2: What are some of the best practices being utilized by these churches that are leading people toward maturity in Christ?

Research Question 3: What are some of the common barriers that the pastors of these churches face in helping their people grow spiritually?

Rationale for the Project

First and foremost, this project matters because Jesus Christ has commissioned his church to make disciples of all nations. If churches are not making disciples, they are not only being ineffective as churches; they are being disobedient to the call of Christ to His Church. Disciples are to make other disciples so that the Great Commission continues to be fulfilled each generation.

Dallas Willard states in his work, *The Great Omission*, “For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship” (4). Willard’s point is that in many of the churches in the Western world, the Great Commission has largely been neglected. Furthermore, Willard suggests, “Most problems in contemporary churches can be explained by the fact that members have never decided to follow Jesus” (5).

Willard reminds the reader with much candor that the church's call is to fulfill the Great Commission, but it has too easily succumbed to two great omissions. Willard states:

But in place of Christ's plan, historical drift has substituted "Make converts (to a particular 'faith and practice') and baptize them into church membership." This causes two great omissions from the Great Commission to stand out. Most important, we start by omitting the making of disciples and enrolling people as Christ's students, when we should let all else wait for that. Then we also omit, of necessity, the step of taking our converts through training that will bring them ever-increasingly to do what Jesus directed.

These two great omissions are connected in practice into one whole. Not having made our converts disciples, it is impossible for us to teach them how to live as Christ lived and taught (Luke 14:26). That was not a part of the package, not what they converted to. When confronted with the example and teachings of Christ, the response today is less one of rebellion or rejection than one of puzzlement: How do we relate to these? What have they to do with us?" (5-6).

Sadly, it seems that Willard's assessment is very accurate of Western churches, and yet in the midst of disobedience and unfaithfulness of the church, the Spirit still breathes and is in the business of bringing dead bones back to life. It is the Spirit of Christ Jesus who promised in the Great Commission that he would be with his disciples until the very end of the age, and hopefully his promise of presence and renewal is true even for converts who have not yet become disciples.

Second, this project matters because the world is in desperate need for the church to be what God intended it to be. As Acts 1 states, Christ's intention is for his followers to be witnesses to the very ends of the earth. The Church is the body of Christ, the ones called out from the world for the sake of the world. The Church is to be filled with students of Christ who are filled with the Holy Spirit, who walk in the Spirit, and bear the fruit of the Spirit. God offers the abundant life of God to all people through His Spirit-

filled followers. God is making all things new, and He is using disciples to bring about His work in the world.

Finally, this project matters because although many churches have become aware of the problem, they are not sure how to fix the problem. Many church leaders are not sure how to better disciple people. Many churches have bought into the programmatic ministry paradigm as the way to make disciples, and they are not sure there is another way. As Ogden argues, “The second cause of the low estate of discipleship is that we have tried to make disciples through programs. The scriptural context for growing disciples is through relationships” (42). Ogden’s point is not that programs are bad or unhelpful in the discipleship process, but that they are insufficient by themselves to produce disciples. Intentional relational investment in a few people at a time is key for discipleship to happen.

Definition of Key Terms

Discipleship: Using Dallas Willard’s definition, a disciple “is one who, intent upon becoming Christ-like and so dwelling in his “faith and practice,” systematically and progressively rearranges his affairs to that end” (The Great Omission, 7). This definition is more than a convert to Christianity. Also, while some authors would suggest categories like “worker” to be a stage beyond disciple, the definition above implies that a disciple becomes a worker in the maturing process. A disciple eventually makes other disciples.

Christian/Spiritual Formation: Les Steele states, “When we speak of Christian formation, we are speaking of the process of becoming what we were first intended to be and are now allowed to be by the justifying work of Christ. The work of sanctification is

at the heart of Christian formation. Nothing less than the transformation of the person is the result of justification. There is not formation without transformation” (24).

Small groups: These are groups of approximately 12 disciples gathering together for purposes of fellowship and discipleship. According to Kevin Watson in his work *The Class Meeting*, there are primarily three kinds of small groups: affinity groups, information-based groups, and life-transformation based groups (5-6).

Class meetings: Named by John Wesley and the Methodists, class meetings are specific small groups of approximately 12 disciples meeting together to share life together with the goal of life transformation/maturation as a disciple of Christ. These are different than information-based small group studies that take place in churches and homes. These small groups are designed for disciples to voice how they are doing in their relationship with the Lord.

Bands: Kevin Watson states, “the band meeting, is a small group of five to seven people who focused on the confession of sin in order to grow in holiness” (*Pursuing Social Holiness*, back cover).

Triads: For Greg Ogden in his work *Transforming Discipleship*, triads are discipleship groups of three people that have proven to be an optimal size for bringing about spiritual growth and maturity in the life of disciples. Ogden says, “Triads provide the setting to bring together the necessary elements for transformation or growth to maturity in Christ” (15).

Delimitations

1. **Denominational:** All pastors who participated in this research project belong to the same denomination as the researcher (Church of the Nazarene) and were known colleagues.
2. **Geographical:** All pastors who participated were in the same region of Middle Tennessee as the researcher, which made it possible for face-to-face interviews with all involved in the interview component.
3. **Male-focused:** Although females were invited to participation in this study, there were only two female co-pastors in this region of 61 pastors and none of them participated in the survey or interviews.

Review of Relevant Literature

This project consulted biblical, theological, historical, psychological and leadership literature to glean insights into the practice of Christian discipleship. Faith development, evangelism, Christian/spiritual formation, small groups, mentoring, and the church were some of the main themes that surfaced in the literature reviewed. Discipleship is clearly not just about spiritual growth as an individual. Rather, discipleship is about the process of the whole person being reoriented and conformed to the person of Christ.

Biblical

Discipleship Essentials by Greg Ogden is a great discipleship resource that is rooted in weekly scriptural study. Its intent is to be a hybrid small group study that is both information-based and transformation-based with scripture being the foundational component to the study. Another great example of this kind of study is *Disciple*:

Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study by Richard Byrd Wilke and Julie Kitchens

Wilke. An additional work by Greg Ogden is *Transforming Discipleship*, which is also a book rooted in the scriptural mandate of making disciples. He addresses why churches have neglected the Great Commission and offers a way of moving forward to faithfully respond to this call. Dallas Willard's *The Great Omission* accomplishes the same task.

A few other works that are solidly based in the biblical foundations of discipleship are *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* by Leroy Eims, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman, *A Blueprint for Discipleship* by Kevin Watson and *Multiply* by Francis Chan. All of these works point to the biblical vision and call of making disciples. Another notable work is Daniel Louw's *A Mature Faith*, which gives an in-depth analysis of the Greek word *teleion* (mature, perfect) that is found throughout the New Testament in describing the maturity and spiritual growth of believers.

Theological

Several works offered rich theological insights to the topic of discipleship. *Nudge* by Leonard Sweet is a great work that talks about how intimately tied discipleship and evangelism is. Sweet's work points to the reality of the God who is already at work in all people and who need to be nudged or awakened to the presence of God already at work in them. Thinking of evangelism and discipleship in these terms points to the optimism that marks Wesleyan theology, and in particular the doctrine of prevenient grace.

Michael Henderson's *One Conversation at a Time*, C. Ellis Nelson's *How Faith Matures* and Evan B. Howard in his work, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* articulate how vitally important the theological concept of the Kingdom of God is when discussing the purpose and goal of discipleship. Other theological emphases

of eschatology, pneumatology, and grace can be seen in authors such as Daniel Louw, Jerry Bridges, Hans Kung, and Les Steele.

Historical

Kevin M. Watson wrote *The Class Meeting, A Blueprint for Discipleship* and *Pursuing Social Holiness*. All three of these works are based out of research on John Wesley and the practices of the early Methodists. Wesley and the Methodists were known for their emphasis on the discipleship of believers. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* by John Wesley is a rich historical and theological resource that points to his doctrine of Christian perfection, which in Wesley's mind is the practical goal of Christian growth and maturation as a disciple.

Psychological

Les L. Steele's *On the Way* is an offering of a practical theology of Christian formation that delves into the topic of developmental psychology. Steele offers great insights from the works of psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, and James Fowler. These voices from psychology offer great insight to the developmental processes going on in the life of individuals who are also developing as a disciple of Christ.

Leadership

Leighton Ford's *Transforming Leadership*, Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey's *Immunity to Change*, and Jim Herrington's *Leading Congregational Change* are all great works that point to the importance of the leader in bringing about a change in focus and culture of an organization. In addition to these works, Jim Putman and Bobby

Harrington's work *Discipleshift* offers great insights into helping a church transition to a new culture in which a church is focused on making disciples who make disciples.

Research Methodology

With the help of the District Superintendent of the MidSouth District Church of the Nazarene, all 61 pastors from the Middle Tennessee region of the MidSouth District Church of the Nazarene were encouraged, via an email from the district office, to participate in this research project one day prior to receiving an email from the researcher who sent an invitation to participate in an online survey on discipleship. Potential participants were given a four-week period to complete the survey, with weekly invitations being sent to those who had not yet completed the survey. At the end of the four weeks, 30 of the pastors (49%) had completed the survey. All 30 pastors were invited via a phone call to participate in an interview. Sixteen of the pastors (26%) participated in a face-to-face interview on discipleship with the researcher over the next 30 days.

Type of Research

This research project was primarily qualitative in nature with a component of quantitative analysis done as well on the surveys. Two instruments were used in this research project: a twenty-question survey and a ten question semi-structured interview. Thirty pastors completed the online survey. Sixteen of the thirty pastors who completed the survey also participated in a face-to-face interview with the researcher.

Participants

The participants in this study were all senior pastors of local churches. Surveys were sent out to all of the 61 pastors in Middle Tennessee. All of the pastors were male excluding

two co-pastoring married couples. Both the husbands and wives were invited to participate in the survey as well as the interview. Of the 61 pastors, two are Korean pastors of Korean-speaking congregations, two are Hispanic pastors of Spanish speaking congregations, and two are African-American pastors of African-American congregations. The remaining pastors are White/Anglo pastors of predominantly White/Anglo churches. It is important to note that the Korean and Hispanic pastors could speak English as well so that participation in the research project was possible.

Data Collection

Data for all three of the research questions was gathered from both the survey and the face-to-face interviews. The semi-structured interview was intentionally designed to provide greater insight to the answers offered on the surveys. The interviews proved effective in giving a more accurate and fuller meaning to the findings revealed in the survey.

Data Analysis

Survey Monkey provided a descriptive statistical analysis of responses from the surveys. Overall percentages of responses were given which gave a bird's eye view of trends. All completed surveys were printed out for the purposes of highlighting and coding reoccurring themes found in the responses on the written components of the survey. Notes were written in the columns of the descriptive statistical analysis document in which simple summary statements were made as well as potential questions and conclusions that might be drawn when compared to the findings of the interviews.

All interviews were face-to-face and were recorded with a digital recorder. Handwritten notes were made during the interviews as well citing body language and

sounds that the digital recorder may not have picked up on. Upon the completion of the interviews, the interviews were listened to multiple times and detailed summary transcriptions of the interviews were typed out and printed off for the purposes of highlighting and coding reoccurring themes.

The researcher then grouped each interview question together electronically and printed off a separate document to more easily compare responses to each question from the participants. Common words were highlighted and underlined in the transcriptions themselves and codes of the themes were also written in the columns. A different color highlighter was used for unique and distinct quotes from participants.

Recurring themes, observations, and a summary of the major findings are included in chapter four. Descriptive analysis charts were also created for chapter four. Finally, with the help of a statistician, chi-square tests were run on all the different demographical components of the survey in order to determine if there were any significant statistical findings. Chapter four offers findings that were both significant and approaching significance.

Generalizability

This project could easily be reproduced in other Nazarene contexts, and it could also be adapted for other denominational contexts with a little editing of the instruments. While the survey and the interviews have a few specific questions to the Nazarene context, the majority of both instruments are general enough to attain similar conclusions about spiritual growth and maturity regardless of denominational affiliations. The questions that are specific to the Nazarene context are in reference to common Nazarene language used for spiritual growth and maturity. In the event that another denomination

would want to use the instruments that were utilized, minor changes in language could be made or the denominational questions could simply be eliminated.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter two offers an overview and dialogue between the wide range of voices on the topics of discipleship, formation, and Christian spiritual growth within the Church. Christian voices from the fields of bible and theology are heard as well as voices from psychology and leadership. In chapter three, one will find an outline of the various ways the researcher gathered data in order to answer his research questions. Chapter four offers an analysis of the findings that emerged from this study, especially as it pertains to survey and interviews. Lastly, in chapter five, one will find an outline of the major findings of this study as well as implications for the ministry of discipleship in and through local churches as well as in and through individual disciples.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides a summary of recent research in the area of discipleship (spiritual formation) and its role in the life and ministry of the Church. It offers a breadth of understanding among scholars and practitioners and sheds light on the various methodologies of discipleship that have been and are being utilized throughout the world today. To be gained is a heightened awareness of the challenges the Church faces as it seeks to engage in the practice of discipleship as well as potential ways forward in meeting such challenges.

Description of Literature Surveyed

First, the literature surveyed includes the biblical foundations for the practice of discipleship and spiritual formation. All of the literature pertaining to Christian discipleship points particularly to the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:19-20. Much of the literature that deals with the biblical foundations of discipleship (formation and maturation as a follower of Christ) spends the majority of reflection on Paul's letters as well as passages from Hebrews and 2 Peter. Second, several resources were surveyed that specifically address the historical spiritual disciplines and the broader category of spirituality of the Christian faith, many of which offered biblical, theological, and historical foundations of how integral spiritual disciplines are to the process of making disciples. Finally, much literature was surveyed from the areas of Christian education, human development (cognitive, moral, identity, and faith), discipleship environments, and the methodologies currently being utilized by the vast majority of churches today.

Biblical Foundations

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 begins with the words, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” Making disciples is central to the mission of the church. According to the gospel of Matthew, these words are the final words of Jesus to his disciples before his ascension. The promise from Jesus that accompanies the Great Commission is that he will always be with his disciples to the very end of the age. Discipleship is a broad term in some ways, so it is important to dig deeper into what is meant by discipleship. It is also vital for the church to remember to embrace the promise of Christ’s presence as the church seeks to better accomplish the Great Commission.

From the outset, it is important to keep in mind the words of Diane Leclerc and Mark Maddix who state, “‘Being a disciple,’ or ‘discipleship,’ is another word for Christian spirituality and focuses on the transformation of the human person into the likeness of Christ” (13). In other words, discipleship also means the process referred to in various ways as spiritual growth, spiritual maturation, and spiritual formation. To a large degree, these designations can be used interchangeably as much of the literature does. So, while the term “disciple” at its basic meaning is “learner,” what is implied is that there is a master teacher, and disciples learn and emulate their teacher. There is a process of growth for a learner as they sit at the feet of their teacher to learn. The ultimate goal of this learning process is transformation into the image of Christ.

Scripture makes clear that the early church struggled with spiritual growth at times. The Apostle Paul spends quite a bit of time in his letters encouraging and nudging believers to grow up in the faith. For example, he articulates his longing and desire that Christ would be formed in the believers in Galatians 4:19. In Colossians 1:28, Paul says,

“He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.” The Greek word *teleion* is translated into English as “mature.” As Daniel Louw states, “Scripture uses the Greek word *teleion* (and its related forms) to describe the process of growth in the fullness of salvation and the development of faith towards perfection and maturity” (127). For Paul, his deepest desire is to present everyone as fully mature in Christ. He wants everyone to grow up as followers.

Before exploring the scriptural passages more in depth, it is important to note from the beginning that for Paul, maturity always happens in the context of being connected to the corporate body of the church. As Louw says, “Maturity, as a process, presupposes the fellowship of believers (*koinonia*)...Mature people are formed through mutual edification of one another and by acceptance of responsibility of one another” (133-134). Kevin Watson echoes Louw at this point when he says, “This method of ‘watching over one another in love’ was the foundation, the bedrock, of Wesleyan discipleship” (A Blueprint for Discipleship, 106). Watson describes in his work the importance of small group accountability for the life of a disciple. If a disciple is going to grow, he or she must be in an environment that continually promotes and fosters growth. Such an environment is one in which believers mutually edify one another and watch over one another.

In light of this emphasis on the importance of the Christian community, one can better understand the scriptural passages dealing with maturing in the faith. The Greek word *teleion* is the same root found in Ephesians 4:13 and 1 Corinthians 14:20. Paul says in Ephesians 4:13, “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son

of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

This comes in the context of Paul speaking corporately and collectively to the church that they would grow up into Christ who is the head of the Church. This hope for maturation in 4:13 further develops Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:17b-18:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Clearly, the desire that Paul has for the church and its members is that they would continue to grow and be more and more conformed to the image and fullness of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 14:20, Paul says, “Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.” While some translations prefer “adults” over “mature,” it is clearly from the same root, and it is specifically the Greek word *teleioi*.

Two other places are worth noting that utilize the Greek root as used above. In both Matthew and Hebrews, the word appears again in the context of Christian maturation. In Matthew 5:48, the call from Jesus is, “Be perfect (*teleioi*) as your heavenly Father is perfect (*teleios*).” The whole context of this passage is a call to be perfect or mature in love, a love that supersedes the love of pagans for it is a love that embraces and includes even the enemy. For Matthew, the mature disciple is one who has the fullness of Christ in him or her and who through the Spirit is able to love even one’s enemies. The goal of Christ-likeness is another way of describing a mature Christian.

In Hebrews 5:14, the word *teleion* (mature) is used as the author urges disciples not to act as spiritual infants but as mature adults. The author says in Hebrews 5:13-14,

“Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” Interestingly, William Lane suggests that the author of Hebrews is using irony in this passage, and makes the claim that the believers are indeed mature and that they simply need to remember that they are in fact no longer infants. Lane goes on to say, “In addressing the community the author recognizes only an either/or. The idea of progressive stages of development and growth toward maturity seems not to have been in his mind” (Lane, Word Biblical Commentary, 137). Lane’s argument is sound, but even if the author of Hebrews does not seem to point to growth toward maturity, he or she clearly sees a distinction. One is mature or one is not mature. The call of Christ is to maturity.

In Hebrews 6:1, the author says, “Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity (*teleiotes*), not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.” While Lane makes a good argument that the author may be thinking more in terms of either/or in regard to being an infant or mature adult in the faith, this verse seems to point to progressive growth towards maturity. An urging to move beyond and forward is explicit. As one moves forward towards maturity, the call of Hebrews 12:2 is crucial in the whole process of maturation. As Hebrews 12:1b-2a says, “And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter (*teleiotes*) of faith.” The picture of maturity is Christ himself, and the call of all disciples is to move forward toward maturity, which is to move forward to Christ himself. This echoes

perfectly the sentiments of Paul in Galatians 4, in which Paul desires so desperately to see Christ formed in the believers.

There is one final biblical text that needs to be surveyed, and it is that of Galatians 5:23. In it, Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit, and he urges the believers to bear the life giving fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Many authors on discipleship have suggested the fruit as key descriptors of what the life of a mature Christian looks like. The mature Christian does not simply display just one or two of the fruit, even if the one fruit is love. As Ben Witherington III suggests, “He (Paul) is calling all of us to manifest all the fruit of the Spirit” (69). Witherington III is certainly aware of the maturing process as people grow and are able by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit. He concludes his discussion on the fruit of the Spirit by stating:

To a real extent, we do need to see ourselves as Christians under construction, not persons who are fully formed and always mature in Christ. But the more we are “in Christ” and “in his community” and around mature Christians and communities that manifest the fruit of the Spirit, the more we ourselves are likely to mature and to know what is expected of us and what Christ-likeness really looks like. (73)

Witherington III offers the reminder of how important community is in the call to and display of maturity in Christ. John Wesley’s words come to mind: “There is no holiness but social holiness.” There is no fruit bearing but social fruit bearing. The “other” is required for any life giving fruit to be on display.

As these passages point to the process of growth and maturity, the question of specific stages arise. It is worth considering whether the Bible points to actual stages along a growth continuum in the way that James Fowler talks about the eight stages of faith development. Jim Peterson in *Lifestyle Discipleship* suggests that the Bible does

name several stages. He states, “The Bible identifies three stages of growth on the road to maturity. Paul refers to the newborn/little child stage, the childhood stage, and the brother/peer stage. The apostle John identifies the same three stages a bit differently. He talks about children, young men, and fathers” (48). While it is possible to articulate perhaps other clearly defined stages of growth in scripture, Peterson’s work clearly keeps the goal and purpose of discipleship front and center: to help people grow into Christ-likeness.

Theological Foundations

Closely related to the biblical foundations for discipleship and formation are the theological foundations. Throughout the literature reviewed, several key theological concepts surfaced in dialogue with discipleship. In no particular order of importance, these key theological concepts will next be examined.

The Kingdom of God

As stated under the biblical foundations, it is important to remember that the goal of discipleship and spiritual formation is not simply the maturity of the individual believer. There is the corporate dimension of discipleship as well as the vocational dimension of what a mature disciple is called to do. Maturity is not just simply for its own sake. There is a telos of the maturation process of the disciple.

Evan B. Howard in his work, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, answers this question by pointing to the essence of the good news that Christ proclaimed. Christ proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God. Howard says, “We distort the biblical portrait of salvation (and of spiritual formation) when we reduce it to the individual dimension. And so we must speak of the aim of spiritual formation as the

‘kingdom of God’” (277). Howard continues by saying, “As a metaphor for the ultimate aim of spiritual formation, the ideal of the kingdom of God urges the church into maturity. The church is the community of the king, the collective body of subjects ordered around and expressing the character of the king” (277). It is clear that the kingdom of God is the broader theological category in which one is to understand grace, salvation, and sanctification. In some ways the kingdom of God is a broader category than Christology and pneumatology for the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit are part of the rule and reign of God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Howard concludes his discussion by suggesting, “The aim of the kingdom of God, then, is to see the deification, the holiness, and the perfection of corporate life, the reorientation and rehabilitation – a realization – of the community of the King” (277).

C. Ellis Nelson also suggests the kingdom of God as being central to the goal of Christian education and maturation. He says, “The goal is a congregation seriously seeking to bring about the reign or kingdom of God in their lives. A secondary goal is the maturation of the individual’s faith as they participate with others in seeking to understand and do the will of God in their community” (203). This is also related to eschatology, as Louw points out in his work. The maturing of faith of the individual has a specific end in mind, which is to be about working toward the goal of the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness.

Michael Henderson in *One Conversation at a Time* states, “The central task of the universe today is extending the kingdom of God into every corner of human life, one follower at a time, one conversation at a time” (11). The emphasis on the kingdom of God as the predominant theological category that drives discipleship is seen once more in

Henderson's work. He goes on to point to the outlandishness of God's plan of entrusting his mission to his disciples. Henderson says:

However, in spite of their immaturity Jesus delegated the next phase of the expansion of the Kingdom to them. It was to be a joint venture; in partnership with Jesus' own Spirit, they were assigned to make disciples of the whole world, following the plan of Kingdom growth Jesus had modeled for them – one disciple at a time, one step at a time.” (11)

Not only is discipleship about the ongoing work of the kingdom, God's mission is a co-mission. He was not interested in a solo act. He wanted his mission to be a joint endeavor and by His grace, that is precisely what has been happening for nearly 2,000 years. While the mission of making disciples has been going on, Henderson reflects later on the current state of the church by suggesting, “Most churches do not grow spiritually or numerically for two reasons: very few church members take the initiative to assume responsibility for their friends' spiritual growth...Second, the 'one another' requires small intimate associations to work – either small groups that stay together for an extended period of time or one-to-one relationships. Not many churches know how to foster these productive little groupings.” (128).

Grace

Jerry Bridges in his work, *Growing Your Faith*, suggests that understanding grace is pivotal in knowing how to best disciple people. Bridges states:

The term *growing in grace* is most often used to indicate growth in Christian character. While I think that usage has merit, a more accurate meaning is continually to grow in our understanding of God's grace...to become progressively more aware of our own continued spiritual bankruptcy and the unmerited, unearned, and undeserved favor of God. (33)

While I think Bridges raises an interesting interpretive possibility of what the phrase “growing in grace” means, he suggests this interpretation not based on any particular

passage of scripture. The traditional meaning of the phrase means growth in Christian character, but Bridges' interpretation makes explicit what is implicit in the concept. As one grows in Christian character, she or he grows in understanding of the nature and depth of God's grace towards the world. Bridges' emphasis also puts attention back on the primacy of God's work in the maturation process. As a follower of Jesus grows, there are specific characteristics displayed, and for Bridges, "One of the first identifying marks of a growing Christian is the pursuit of holiness" (119).

While Bridges perhaps had in mind more than just 2 Peter 3:18, it is important to emphasize that spiritual growth is both enabled and sustained by grace. Peter says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." The pursuit of holiness is the pursuit of growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is also important to remember that Peter's call to grow in grace is a corporate call to the community. The church is a means of grace to all disciples in the maturing process, and it is through the corporate body that individuals share together in the variety of the means of grace to grow into Christlikeness.

Pneumatology

Daniel Louw offers a great discussion on the role of pneumatology in developing a mature faith. For Louw, it is clear that the Holy Spirit plays a primary role in the formation and maturation of a follower of Christ. Louw states:

Pneuma realization implies that human beings receive their *humanitas* at the instant of *humilitas*. The *humilitas* of pneumatic people is their real greatness – a greatness that enables them to praise God in everything. Humility is the anthropological consequence of predestination and justification. New people are humble people and therefore also sensitive and caring. (119)

Louw is suggesting that God's transformative work and intention for humanity is that they would reflect the very humility that is displayed in Christ. It is important to note that while Louw's understanding of predestination is more Reformed than Wesleyan, as a Wesleyan, predestination can be understood here more in terms of vocation rather than in terms of soteriology. In other words, humility is a consequence of God's vocational call to be a blessing to the world while simultaneously arising from God's justifying work. This humility is the outflow of one who has experienced God's justifying work in Christ and is then aware of God's vocational call to the community of faith. It is only by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit that one is made new and called to embody the good news in the world.

The Holy Spirit's work in the life of a disciple not only brings about justification but helps foster and sustain growth in each individual and the corporate body of the church. In regard to individual maturation, Louw says, "The essential condition for Christian adulthood is our capacity for growth. Bouwsma's interpretation does not regard the worst state of a person as being sinful (sins can be forgiven), but rather the cessation of growth, arrested development, or remaining static at any point in life" (124). While Louw is reflecting on another's work, Louw suggests that an individual's refusal to grow is a sure sign of immaturity. Sadly, many people who regularly attend church simply refuse to grow. Louw observes this as do many other authors in the literature reviewed. Many pastors who participated in the interviews of this research project also made this observation.

For Louw, mature Christians will continue to grow and change in postures and practices. Louw states, "Mature people in Christ reveal new characteristics because their

volition and their hearts' attitudes have changed. This influences their temperament and character and deepens their psychic aspects of their lives" (132). Louw suggests that as an individual matures, they no longer orient themselves to self-interest but to Christ's interests. As Louw says, "This new orientation signifies a practical life of bearing fruit through the Holy Spirit." The mature disciple displays the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:23.

Christology

One cannot help but understand that the doctrine of Christ is integrally related to the call of making disciples. It was Christ who gave the Great Commission. It was Christ who promised his presence to the disciples as they went about fulfilling the Great Commission. The aim and goal of making disciples is to lead people to grow in their relationship with Christ so that they themselves become like the teacher. All of this is done for the sake of Christ's Kingdom. Making disciples of Jesus Christ is the way the kingdom of God is going to be ushered in. Christ is at the center of the whole process of maturing as a disciple of Jesus. He is the model. Hans Kung points to this reality beautifully when he says:

He is not an optimal model simply to be copied in every detail, but a basic model to be realized in an infinite variety of ways according to time, place and person...If someone commits himself to Jesus as the standard, if he lets himself be determined by the person of Jesus Christ as the basic model for a view of life and a practice of life, this means the transformation of the whole man. For Jesus Christ is not only an external goal...he determines and influences man's life and conduct, not only externally, but from within." (551)

Kung points to the holistic transformation that is the goal of discipleship, and he rightly points to the internal work of the Spirit of Christ that is working with humanity to bring about the transformation that He desires for all.

Salvation/Sanctification

Thomas E. Trask and Wayne I. Goodall in their work *The Fruit of the Spirit* state, “You cannot consistently display the fruit of the Spirit unless you have totally surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. Because of your self-discipline, you may be able to perform random acts of love and kindness...however, such acts will be inconsistent because they do not flow from the consistent flow of the Holy Spirit’s power within you” (23). Trask and Goodall point to the important work of sanctification, which from a scriptural and theological standpoint is part of the saving work of God. Thus, total surrender is usually associated with sanctification as compared to justification, but both sanctification and justification are a part of the broad umbrella of salvation.

Les Steele offers a unique perspective on the sanctifying work of God in *On the Way* when he suggests, “Christian formation does not aim at self-actualization but at self-transcendence, which comes through our painful attempts to deny ourselves and care for others before and above ourselves” (30). Steele gives interesting insight to the idea that Christian formation is quite different than the psychological definition of maturity as self-actualization. Sanctification then for Steele is the process of denying self and putting others concerns first.

In regard to the full scope of the salvation, Steele offers a great conversation on what is meant by conversion and how conversion is not only about justification but happens along the way of becoming like Christ. Steele says, “Conversion must involve a painful reinterpretation of one’s past, facing up to one’s sin and failure, and dealing with the ongoing task of working out one’s salvation with fear and trembling” (120). He goes on to state, “We are not converted, we are being converted. The initial conversion is just

the beginning of a series of conversions that lead us further to the call of Christian maturing” (120). Steele addresses conversion in the context of the maturation process including both conversion and nurture. The idea is that throughout the nurturing process, an individual will go through multiple conversions throughout the journey. For Trask, Goodall, and Steele, salvation (which includes conversion, justification, and sanctification) encompasses the whole journey of maturing in Christ.

Eschatology

Many authors discussed discipleship in the context of eschatology. Scripture points to the idea that God desires to move humanity towards an end goal. Certainly, the apostle Paul in his letters articulates a correlation between sanctification and eschatology. Paul desires to see Christ fully formed in all members of the church. In the orthodox faith, this is called theosis. It is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of disciples who are being transformed more and more into the image of Christ. Woltershorff varies slightly from this perspective as he suggests an emphasis on the biblical concept of “shalom” as being what God is moving humans toward. This is certainly not contradictory to what is meant by sanctification, for the work of sanctification is the work of the God of shalom and wholeness who wants us to be made whole (a life of shalom). Nicholas Woltershorff says:

There is in the Bible a vision of what it is that God wants for God’s human creatures – a vision of what constitutes human flourishing and of our appointed destiny. The vision is not that of disembodied individual contemplation of God; thus it is not the vision of heaven...It is the vision of shalom. (23)

For Woltershorff, a mature Christian is one who is not only at peace with God and with others, but he or she is one who prays, struggles, and works for peace for all of humanity.

Clearly, a mature Christian is one that takes seriously the call (vocation) to be a peacemaker in our world.

This emphasis on shalom highlights once more one of the nine fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:23. A mature Christian lives according to the Spirit by bearing the life giving fruit of the Spirit in the world. The Christian witness is on display as being an active participant in being a peace-maker in the world. Woltershorff sees all of Christian education in the church and in the academy as ultimately being done for the sake of shalom in the world.

Johannes A. van der Ven in his work, *Formation of the Moral Self*, looks at character formation with a different eschatological perspective. Van der Ven reflects on the Last Judgment in Matthew 25 as the time when character will be revealed based on past actions. He states:

Character formation should narrate, clarify, and initiate the tensions surrounding three fundamental kinds of choices that must be made time and time again: the paradoxes and aporias of self-concern versus other-concern, care for the significant other versus care for the foreign other, and the short way of love versus the long way. (380)

In other words, van der Ven describes maturity of a disciple as one who balances these relational tensions well. It is important to clarify what he means by the short way versus the long way of love. Van der Ven suggests that the shorter way of love is to do a loving act for an individual who is suffering the evils of this world whereas the longer way of love is to suffer with individuals and work towards fighting the systemic structures of evil that are causing the sufferings of many. Dorothy Bass in her work, *Practicing Our Faith*, articulates the shorter and longer way of love as “Christian Practices” (204). Bass states, “Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time to address

fundamental needs and conditions of humanity and all creation in the light of and in response to God's active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ" (204). This definition points to addressing both the human needs (shorter way) and the human condition over time (longer way). Educating people in knowing how to navigate and balance such tensions is part of the work of spiritual formation.

Historical Foundations

Athanasius talked extensively about the restorative work of Christ that happens in all believers. Nonna Verna Harrison in her work *God's Many-Splendored Image* says, "Human beings are made according to the image, and only Christ is the Image in an absolute sense; he is the model according to which we made in the beginning" (39). She goes on to reflect on the restorative work of Christ by quoting Athanasius who said:

You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and the likeness is redrawn on the same material. In this way also, the all-holy Son of the Father, being an Image of the Father, came near to our place, that he might renew the human being made in accord with himself." (Harrison, 39)

Clearly, the work of Christ in restoring humanity into his image is humble and beautiful. God has no desire to throw humanity away as useless. He has every desire to restore that which has been lost or distorted. Harrison says this about Athanasius: "Here Athanasius shows Christ fulfilling two functions as he restores the image in humankind. As God, he is the artist creating the image in us. As man, he is the model according to which the image in each of us is made" (39-40). Harrison's reflection points to Athanasius' conviction that God cannot redeem that which he did not assume. As the God-man, Jesus was the only one who could redeem and restore humanity.

While Athanasius is certainly not the only early church father that could be mentioned, what is clear throughout history is that the rich historical tradition offers the contemporary church a variety of ways to engage in the practice of discipleship and spiritual formation. While the scope of this dissertation does not allow for detailed accounts of individuals who have contributed to the practice of discipleship and formation today, what one can see over history is that key spiritual disciplines were practiced in a variety of ways that brought about the maturity of disciples of Jesus Christ.

The historical church did not create the spiritual disciplines, although in some ways new methodologies of how the disciplines are practiced have been created by the church. Rather, the spiritual disciplines have their foundation in the very life of Christ. Bill Hull in his work, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, says, “When we intentionally engage in the same disciplines that Christ practiced while on earth, Christ’s character, otherwise known as the fruit of the Spirit, is gradually developed in us over time” (18). So, while people can now learn from the spiritual journeys of the saints through the ages, they remember that their journeys in utilizing the spiritual disciplines were attempts to pattern their lives after the Master Teacher himself.

While there is a plethora of works on the spiritual disciplines, a few are worth highlighting. In recent history, Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* is one of the most well known works on the spiritual disciplines. Foster offers the reminder that “God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us” (7). Foster points to the need that the world has of deep people, people who have been transformed and changed by the Spirit of God. Foster states, “Our world is hungry for

genuinely changed people. Leo Tolstoy observes, ‘Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself.’ Let us be among those who believe that the inner transformation of our lives is a goal worthy of our best effort” (11).

In *Sacred Rhythms*, Ruth Haley Barton describes spiritual transformation as a journey of discovery. She says that spiritual transformation is: “choosing a way of life that opens us to the presence of God in the places of our being where our truest desires and deepest longings stir” (*Sacred Rhythms*, 13). Thus, the spiritual disciplines should not be seen as “oughts” rather they should be seen as invitations to discover God and oneself in relationship to and with God. Barton in another of her works *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, says, “God’s invitation is a winsome one, but it is not casual; it is an invitation from his very heart to the depths of our being” (18). In both of Barton’s works, she emphasizes the importance of community and spiritual friendship in the process of spiritual transformation. It is a journey together: with others and with God.

This journey that Barton points to is going to be as unique to each individual, so it is important to keep in mind that some spiritual disciplines will resonate and be more helpful than others depending on the person. Steve Harper in *Spiritual Disciplines 101* says, “Our personality traits and talents combine with our spiritual gifts to make us men and women who will be used by God in an amazing variety of ways. And when it comes to the spiritual disciplines, it means we will not all make use of the same ones.” (13). The goal is not to make sure all spiritual disciplines are all regularly practiced. The goal is Christlikeness, and the disciplines are the means to the end.

Jerry Bridges frames the spiritual disciplines in language of intentionality. Bridges says, “Spiritual growth occurs as a result of intentional and appropriate effort.

The word intentional implies a diligent pursuit of a clear goal. Appropriate indicates that we must use the God-given ways of growth given to us in the Bible” (17). In many ways, this emphasis on intentionality cannot be overstated. Training oneself for anything, especially godliness, takes intentionality and effort. Sadly, many in the world, especially in North America, are much more preoccupied with their body than with their soul. There is certainly a correlation between caring for the body and the soul since the human is whole and to care for one aspect is to give care to another at a certain level. However, experience confirms that many people can be physically fit and not spiritually fit and, sadly, vice versa. No matter what kind of fitness one talks about, intentionality and effort is crucial.

Richard Foster and Emilie Griffin in *Spiritual Classics* state, “Spiritual formation involves a fundamental choice. Choosing to live for Jesus Christ may mean adopting a certain style of life, or perhaps more properly, a rule of life. We take on a series of spiritual practices that will open us to God’s work in our lives” (xiii). Once again, Foster and Griffin point to the importance of intentionality and effort. Many “Christians” have not made the choice to adopt such a lifestyle. In some ways, this echoes the critique of Dallas Willard who argues that many Christians have never decided to follow Jesus. They have not made the fundamental choice. Perhaps many are still counting the cost, but it seems that many are not even interested in the conversation that there is a cost to be counted in following Jesus.

David Platt makes this same point in *Follow Me*. Many Christians filling the churches of North America are not really followers of Jesus. The church must do a better job at discipleship so that the call to be a disciple is followed up by the appropriate and

adequate training needed for maturing and formation into Christlikeness. Training in the spiritual disciplines is a key component that is lacking in many churches. To a large degree, this lack of training may be correlated to the lack of training that clergy has received in the spiritual disciplines. The regular and ongoing practice of disciplines must take place within community, and the example of the early church in Acts 2:42-47 suggests a daily communal practice of fellowship and other spiritual disciplines.

Human Development Considerations

It is important to state from the beginning that God's transformative work is holistic. He is not interested in just our spiritual growth. He is interested in all of our growth. He wants us to grow cognitively, emotionally, morally, physically, and spiritually. These things can be talked about in isolation from one another, but they cannot be completely separated from one another. In *Growing up in Christ*, David McKenna suggests, "And our need to grow spiritually is as natural as our need to grow emotionally, intellectually, and morally. In fact, the dimension are so interlocked that if we grow spiritually, we will also grow toward maturity in all other areas" (13). McKenna's presupposition is that the human personality cannot be divided so it is natural to understand God's desire for holistic growth and maturity. As one grows in spiritual maturity, fruit that has eternal value is produced in the life of a disciple.

When thinking about identity development, the conversation of what happens to identity as one matures in Christ comes to the forefront. The aim of spiritual maturity is to become more and more like Christ, and this has implications for personal identity. In a real sense, the aim of Christian maturity is to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ, but this conforming work does not mean we are called to lose a sense of self.

As Peter R. Holmes and Susan B. Williams state, “We all know, of course, that Christ-likeness does not mean that we all become the same, clone of Christ. Christ in you must mean that you become more of how you were created to be, in God’s image. So in this sense, the more Christ-like you become, then the more unique you become, the more distinct, and the more alive” (6).

Contemporary Internal Challenges of the Church

Obstacles to Maturity and Signs of Maturity

There are some obstacles and barriers that must be overcome in order for the church to more effectively and faithfully make disciples of Jesus Christ. Spiritual growth and depth takes time, and one of the greatest enemies to spiritual growth, at least in North America, is that of busyness and hurry. John Ortberg in *Growing in Christ* reflects on the problem of superficiality and says, “If superficiality is our curse, then Hurry pronounces the spell. Depth always comes slowly” (55). Hurry and busyness can easily lead to superficiality because relationships take time to develop and grow. This is true in human relationships, and it is true in one’s relationship with Christ.

Ortberg continues his reflection on the epidemic of hurry in people’s lives and suggests, “The most serious sign of hurry sickness is a diminished capacity to love. Love and hurry are fundamentally incompatible. Love always takes time, and time is the one thing hurried people don’t have” (56). Once again, love is at the center of genuine relationships and to love God and to love others requires time. To grow in love takes time and hurried people have little to no capacity to fulfill the greatest commandment. This is certainly an epidemic in the church that must be overcome, especially in the North American church. The barrier of hurriedness points to the need for people to learn to

practice Sabbath, among other things. In Ortberg's words, "The first practice is one we might call 'slowing'" (57). While Ortberg offers suggestions to the reader to practice "slowing," helping people practice Sabbath who are not accustomed to it has indeed proven to be a great challenge of the church in its' discipleship endeavors. Matthew Sleeth echoes Ortberg's emphasis in his work *24/6*, which offers great insight into recovering the practice of Sabbath in today's culture.

In *The Life You've Always Wanted*, Ortberg states, "The primary goal of the spiritual life is human transformation. It is not making sure people know where they're going after they die, or helping them have a richer interior life, or seeing that they have lots of information about the Bible, although these can be good things" (24). Ortberg points here to the obstacle of getting people to think beyond heaven as the goal. Far too many Christians are content with knowing they have accepted Jesus as their Savior and thus they get to go to heaven, and, consequently, many do not care much about anything else other than their personal salvation. This point reiterates Evan Howard's discussion on the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is about all things being made new. Personal salvation is only a small part in the grand vision of God's saving work in the world. Humanity is not just saved from sin and hell but also saved for the purposes of continuing God's ongoing mission in the world.

Another obstacle that the church must overcome is that of expectation of disciples to make other disciples. Bull Hull suggests, "a disciple finds and teaches disciples to follow Jesus" (20). Hull goes on to pose an important insight to the obstacle mentioned above. He says, "Why is our discipleship only in-house and nonreproductive? The answer is because we have not taught or expected people we train to reproduce" (20).

Perhaps one of the easiest obstacles to overcome is that of not having a plan for spiritual growth. Stephen Rankin says, “When it comes to growth toward maturity, many (most?) Christians do not have a plan. Consequently, they do not know how to gauge growth” (56). The research points to this assessment being accurate not only for most Christians but for most churches as well. Aubrey Malphurs agrees with Rankin’s assessment when he says:

I’m sure you would agree that every church should have a simple, clear pathway for making disciples. So the question is, “Does your church have such a strategy in place...my experience is that most churches either wouldn’t have an answer or wouldn’t have a clear answer, because church leaders simply aren’t thinking that way.” (8)

Both Rankin and Malphurs point to the reality that most churches in North America are lacking strategic plans to make disciples. Pastors and church leaders must commit more time to work on devising simple and strategic plans to help people grow. While maturation of a Christian cannot be easily packaged, there is much more a church can do to help foster the growth of disciples.

David Platt in *Follow Me* addresses another significant barrier in discipleship. Platt points out the great failure of most disciples and churches to have a plan for reproducing, which in many ways points to the deeper problem of desire. Platt challenges churches:

Maybe a more important first question, though is this: Do you desire to reproduce? Deep down inside, do you long to see people come to know Christ through your life? If the answer to that question is not an unhesitating, unapologetic yes, then I encourage you to search your heart. Is Christ in you?...If these things are not a reality in your life, then no matter what decision you made however many years ago and no matter what church you attended last week, you may not actually be a Christian, for these features are the fruit of follower of Christ.” (209)

While Platt can come across as very confrontational in his work, this probing question gets to the heart of the issue of desire and affection. Another term for affection is disposition as other works emphasize such as James K.A. Hunter's book, *Desiring the Kingdom*. A mature Christian displays the fruit of desiring and wanting to reproduce. A mature disciple wants to make disciples. Sadly, both the literature reviewed and the data collected in the surveys and interviews of this research project pointed to the reality that many Christians do not own this vocation of making other disciples for themselves. They defer to the pastors and more mature leaders, and never see in themselves the capacity or desire to make disciples.

One of the other obstacles that must be overcome is for disciples to no longer hide their brokenness. This requires trust and transparency. Dwight Carlson says, "In contrast to hiding our brokenness, the mature follower of Christ who has moved into the later stages of spiritual growth will realize that he or she must become more transparent in order to continue maturing" (199). Transparency requires trust and confidence in God that voicing one's brokenness will lead to healing and growth.

Another important consideration that can prove to be an obstacle or barrier is that of the meaning of a disciple. A disciple does not necessarily equate to spiritual maturity. Aubrey Malphurs in his book *Strategic Disciple Making* states, "This is so important to the discussion that it bears repeating: a disciple may be a deeply committed believer who is "sold out" to Christ; however, a disciple may also not be a committed believer, but still a believer in Christ" (33). Malphurs raises another important point when he says, "The Christian is always in process, which will include setbacks as well as progress toward Christian maturity" (34). As the church goes about the discipleship process, it is

reasonable to expect setbacks along the journey, but it is just as reasonable to expect growth. Both are part of the journey of discipleship, just as both are a part of the journey of life.

Another obstacle that must be overcome is for the church to get out from thinking that cognitive growth and development will automatically lead to maturity. Cognitive growth and learning new information about the Bible and theology is important, but humans can easily take in new information and not allow it to translate to new behavior and practice. Discipleship must focus on the whole person. Lawrence O. Richards in his book *Christian Education* says:

In these and many other ways a person can reduce dissonance or disequilibrium within his personality. When Christians use such mechanisms it is not at all unusual for them to attend church, hold conservative beliefs, and fail completely to develop attitudes, values, and behaviors which are in harmony with the gospel. (63)

To focus on the whole person, Richards suggests that discipleship must be done and taught as a way of life. He states, “we can insist that God’s Truth must be learned in exactly the same ways that any ‘experienced reality’ is to be learned! That is, we are to be disciplined into faith’s life in the same way any person is disciplined into his or her culture” (77). Richards contends that the primary agent of education and discipleship is not a program like Sunday school or small groups but is the shared life and practice of the body of believers that teaches the faith and helps others grow in the faith. Edward Hammett agrees with Richards when he says, “Spiritual formation in a secular age often begins with focusing on people and not programs or even their conversion” (118). What Hammett and Richards are both pointing to is the relational discipleship model that is articulated in Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington’s book *Discipleshift*.

Discipleship and Its Relationship to Other Purposes of the Church

Daniel Louw suggests in his reflection on maturity in Christ as seen in Hebrews that there is a direct connection between discipleship and evangelism/mission. Louw states, “Maturity describes our Christian service, and is directly linked to our calling to witness in the world (vocation). By testifying, believers prove that they are prepared to follow Christ and to vouch for the truth of the Gospel in the midst of persecution” (131). For Louw, a mature disciple is one that unashamedly engages in testifying to the work of Christ in their lives and engages as a full participant as a witness to Christ in the world. Disciples are not growing or maturing if they are not engaged in evangelism. Thomas Groome would agree with Louw’s observation when Groome says, “According to gospel math, what we give away in faith returns a hundredfold. So every effort to share our faith greatly enriches our own” (Osmer and Schweitzer, 2009). While Groome is reflecting on the specific context of parents discipling and sharing their faith with their children, his implication is that regardless of who one shares his faith with, the act itself fosters growth and maturation in the life of the disciple who is doing the sharing.

Leonard Sweet’s work *Nudge* is more focused on redefining evangelism; he states from the beginning of his work the intimate relationship between evangelism and discipleship. “Evangelism for too long has been disconnected from discipleship. In *Nudge*, evangelism is discipleship. What yokes evangelism to discipleship, I propose, is the art of attention, attending to life, and attending to God” (21). Sweet’s work offers great insight into how mature disciples can practice their vocation as witnesses in the world. For Louw, Groome, and Sweet, it is clear that evangelism is the natural outflow of

the life of a maturing disciple. Evangelism is the first step in making disciples of the nations.

An additional voice that adds to the conversation on the relationship between discipleship and evangelism is Timothy E. O'Connell who says, "So there is an activism to discipleship, an activism of poetry and prophecy and practicality. There is a mission at its core" (182). O'Connell writes this in the context of addressing the problem of many Christians who overemphasize that it is God's grace that does the work of transforming them. O'Connell is adamant that God's grace is first and foremost in the process, but disciples are to be active in the process as well. This activism is especially outward focused on the evangelistic mission of the church, which is to go and make disciples.

Stephen Rankin in *Aiming at Maturity*, states, "Christian maturity therefore entails specific dispositions and behaviors that show the disciple becoming increasingly like Jesus for the sake of accomplishing Christ's purposes in the world. For the sake of Christ's Kingdom, a mature disciple looks and acts like Jesus in the day-to-day messiness of real life" (6). Rankin goes on to clarify what he means by dispositions. He says, "dispositions ultimately lead to actions. The word disposition itself means a characteristic tendency to act in a certain way in a given situation. Dispositions make evident the quality of our character. We are therefore talking about the fruit our lives produce. Sooner or later, the fruit becomes visible" (7). Maturing Christians will display fruit of the Spirit. Rankin makes another important observation when he says, "grown-up Christians keep growing. Spiritual maturity is never a static state. It is always a maturing maturity" (8).

It is also worth pointing to the relationship of discipleship with worship. Astley et al. state, “The teaching of Christian doctrine and the formation of Christian attitudes must take place together. Neither process can take place authentically without the other” (250). They suggest that the worship service is the ideal place for these two processes to take place. In other words, in worship, people are being both cognitively and affectively shaped and formed. They conclude, “through the implicit catechesis of liturgy, we come to learn the Christian mode of being in the world as our attitudes, emotions, and experiences are formed through the symbolic power of ritual and ceremonial. There it is that we become fully Christian” (250). Corporate worship is a foundational component of the maturation process of a disciple. Gary Thomas in *Sacred Pathways* echoes Astley et al. when he says: “It is neither wise nor scriptural to pursue God apart from the community of faith. Our individual expressions of faith must be joined to corporate worship with the body of Christ” (16-17). For Thomas, practicing the spiritual disciplines is to be done in the context of the community, and the corporate worship service is integral to the context of the community of faith.

Discipleship environments and methodologies

Small Groups

Much research points to the crucial role of community in the process of spiritual formation, and small groups in particular are one of best environments for spiritual growth to take place in the life of believers. One is reminded that “Christian holiness does not reside exclusively in the merits of an individual person, but rather in the collective journey of a people being transformed in God together” (David Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality*, 224). Small groups throughout the centuries have fostered this

transformative work. In the days of John Wesley in particular, the importance of the small group came to the forefront of Protestant believers. John Wesley's small groups (class meetings and bands) were crucial components to the discipleship process of believers. Without small groups, converts to the Christian faith easily fell back into their former ways of living. With small groups, converts had the necessary structure and community that led to maturation in the faith.

Michael Henderson's work offers great insight into the different kinds of small groups that led to holistic maturation. He says, "Those who are committed to making disciples in the world of the twenty-first century will do well to learn from him (John Wesley) the intricate workings of the class meetings and how those interactions fostered spiritual growth and serious discipleship" (John Wesley's Class Meeting, 15). While one of problems seen in the North American church is that many "Christians" have grown cognitively, they have not grown in other ways. There has been growth in understanding of orthodoxy, but there has been a disconnect to orthopraxy and orthopathy. The genius of Wesley's different small groups is that there were different environments geared for cognitive, behavioral and affective growth. Wesley understood the importance of dealing with issues of the heart and affections. He was interested in holiness of heart and life, the affections and the behaviors. Wesley saw that many Christians could grow in knowledge and understanding, and yet in many cases it did not translate to full life transformation. Class meetings and bands were the environments and answers to the dilemma that was being seen in Wesley's day, and the scenario is the same today.

The role of the leader/pastor

Dallas Willard challenges the idea that the pastor/leaders first responsibility is to pursue the godless. In *The Spirit of the Disciplines* he says, “The leader’s task is to equip saints until they are like Christ (Eph. 4:12), and history and the God of history waits for him to do his job” (246). He does not deny the call to evangelize; however, Willard sees evangelism as something that will be automatic and unstoppable once the equipping of the saints task is completed. What must happen first though is that “Everyone who has a pastoral role to others...must strive for a specific understanding of what is happening to those who come regularly under his or her influence and must pay individual attention to their development” (Willard, 247).

One-on-one/Triads

As Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington suggest in *Discipleshift*, “a church exists to make disciples who make disciples. And the primary methodology is Christlike love expressed in life-on-life relationship” (38). What is clear in Putman and Harrington’s work is that discipleship happens best in the context of intimate and intentional relationships. Greg Ogden’s *Transforming Discipleship* reiterates this same point. Ogden reaches the conclusion out of his personal experience of discipling parishioners in the churches that he pastored.

Congregation

C. Ellis Nelson offers a great critique of Sunday school as being the agent of education in the life of believers. Nelson’s claim is that the congregation itself is the agent of change in the life of a believer. In his work *How Faith Matures*, he argues, “a person’s faith matures when life experiences are interpreted in the light of the Christian tradition in order to understand do the will of God amid ongoing event is which that

person is involved. Because a congregation is apart of the body of Christ, it is the place where individuals receive guidance” (18). Maturing in the faith happens within the context of the community of the congregation. It happens in the context of relationships with the rest of the body.

Family

Perhaps one of the best methodologies for the church to embrace is reminding families of the importance of discipleship in the home. Christian parents must take seriously their primary role as those who disciple their children. For this to happen, “the whole life of the home should be suffused with the values and perspectives of the Christian faith...In sum, everything about the Christian family should bear witness to its faith: this is how it educates” (Thomas Groome, *A Public Faith*, edited by Osmer and Schweitzer, 2008). Groome sees the Christian family unit in the home as a microcosm of the church. The role of the church then is about equipping parents with tools and also fostering growth opportunities for them so that as they grow, they are able to lead their children to deeper levels of growth in the faith.

Summary of Overarching Principles

Throughout the literature reviewed, several overarching principles about discipleship/spiritual formation rose to the surface. These principles offer a summary of what was gained from the conversation partners. In no particular order of importance, here are the principles gleaned from the reading that will help inform the research design of this project:

Principle #1: Scripture’s call and vision for spiritual growth for all of humanity is abundantly clear.

Principle #2: Spiritual growth requires intentional effort, intentional relationships, and intentional practices. Because of the nature of relationships, spiritual growth takes time.

There is no fast track to spiritual growth and maturity in Christ.

Principle #3: Spiritual growth does not happen in isolation from the community of faith.

The biblical vision of spiritual growth is both personal and corporate, but these two aspects can never be separated completely. There is interdependence between them.

Principle #4: For spiritual growth to happen, the discipleship done in and by the church must be holistic in methodology. To only focus on cognitive growth can easily keep disciples in the stage of spiritual infancy. Cognition, affections, and behaviors are all crucial to the maturing process of a disciple. The mature disciple will display not just knowledge of biblical and theological content, but he or she will display Christ-like affections and behaviors as seen in the fruit of the Spirit.

Principle #5: Spiritual growth requires human effort, but it must always be understood that growth is primarily a work of God's transformative grace. The spiritual disciplines are examples of giving effort and waiting on God for transformation.

Principle #6: The spiritual growth of individuals and the body of believers is the embodiment of the good news of the Kingdom of God at work in and through his people. The lives of mature and maturing disciples are the evidence that the Kingdom of God is here and is coming in its fullness.

Principle #7: Spiritual growth happens primarily through key relationships with other disciples, not discipleship programs.

Principle #8: Spiritual growth in the life of a disciple leads to disciples making other disciples.

Gaps Analysis in Literature

The literature available on discipleship is exhaustive from multiple perspectives. While there may be literature available that is primarily based on interviews with disciples on what has helped them spiritually mature, most of the literature found for this project did not emphasize the perspective of the personal experience of individual believers as they mature. Rather, the literature tended to emphasize the author's observations and experiences about the state of discipleship in the North American context. There is certainly a need for more research and literature on the topic of how learning styles affect the discipleship process for individual believers. Also, there is a lack of research and literature specifically available on the state of discipleship in the Nazarene context.

Research Design

This research project was a pre-intervention study that included both qualitative and quantitative analysis. It utilized two components for gathering data: a survey and a semi-structured interview. First, sixty-one pastors were invited to participate in the survey. Thirty pastors completed the survey. Second, sixteen of the thirty also participated in a face-to-face interview with the researcher.

All participants in the research project received and signed consent forms to participate in the research. The interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and transcripts of the interviews were made. Both the survey responses and the interview transcripts were coded so that reoccurring themes could be detected. With the help of a statistician, chi-square tests were run on all the possible correlations between the

demographic questions and the remaining questions about the understanding and practice of discipleship in each of the pastor's contexts.

Review of Chapter

The literature reviewed provided a dialogue between several conversation partners on the topic of discipleship. The dialogue included researchers from various perspectives including biblical, theological, and historical perspectives on discipleship. Perspectives from psychology, church leadership, and ministry practitioners were also included in the literature review. The result of the dialogue provided both a breadth and depth to the many facets of discipleship that must be kept in mind when seeking to be faithful to the Great Commission of making disciples.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter contains the detailed research design that was used for this project. Included are the three research questions that informed the evaluation instruments, a description of the participants in the research, a description of the evaluation instruments, and a detailed description of the procedure for analyzing the evidence collected. This chapter concludes with a statement on the reliability and validity of the project design.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of discipleship practices in Nazarene Churches in Middle Tennessee, which is part of the MidSouth District Church of the Nazarene. The goal for this research was to identify common and unique practices of discipleship that are effective, as well as to identify common and unique barriers that would help inform the researcher in developing tools and strategies to improve the effectiveness of discipleship in and through the local church.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How is discipleship and the goal of discipleship understood by pastors of Nazarene churches on the MidSouth District Church of the Nazarene?

Several questions on both the survey and the semi-structured interview with pastors addressed this question. These included question 7 on the survey and questions 1 and 10 on the semi-structured interview. They are listed below.

Survey Question:

#7: One definition of discipleship is the following: “Discipleship is the process by which the church (corporately and individually) teaches and leads others to grow in Christlikeness.” Would you consider this an acceptable definition?

Interview questions:

#1: How do you define discipleship?

#10: Are there any questions that I haven’t asked that you think are essential to improving the way we go about discipleship as Nazarenes?

Research Question 2: What are some of the best practices being utilized by these churches that are leading people toward maturity in Christ?

Questions 8, 9, and 11-16 on the survey and were questions 2-8 on the semi-structured interview address this research question. They are listed below.

Survey Questions:

#8: In your current ministry setting, which of the following discipleship environments is the most fruitful in helping people grow spiritually?

#9: In regard to the discipleship environment selected above in question 8, how long has your church been offering this environment (or program)?

#11: Do you utilize any tools for measuring spiritual growth?

#12: If you answered yes to the question above, briefly describe that tool (or methodology) here:

#13: Are there specific practices or programs that your church utilizes to help disciples know how to make other disciples?

#14: If you answered yes to the question above, briefly describe that practice (or program/methodology) here:

#15: Are there specific practices and programs that your church utilizes to develop spiritual leaders (those who help others move from where they are spiritually to where God wants them to be)?

#16: If you answered yes to the question above, briefly describe that practice (or program/methodology) here:

Interview Questions:

#2: How would you describe the state of discipleship in our denomination?

#3: How would you describe the state of discipleship in your current ministry setting? To whatever degree the state of discipleship in your church is different from the denomination, what are the reasons for the differences and/or similarities?

#4: In your current ministry setting, which discipleship environments do you feel are most effective in cultivating spiritual growth? What is it about these environments that make them so effective? What strategy/strategies do you have in place to help people get into these environments?

#5: In your current ministry setting, how do you measure spiritual growth in your parishioners? Do you have any suggestions of how our denomination can better measure spiritual growth?

#6: As Nazarenes, we state in our article of faith on entire sanctification that there is a distinction between a pure heart and a mature character. How do you help cultivate a pure heart in disciples? And then, what practices do you utilize to help people grow beyond a "pure heart" to maturity of character?

#7: In your current ministry setting, what discipleship practices are you currently utilizing that help people better embody the core value of missional?

#8: In your current ministry setting, what discipleship practices are you utilizing that help people know how to make other disciples?

Research Question 3: What are some of the common barriers that the pastors of these churches face in helping their people grow spiritually?

Questions 2-6, 10, and 17-21 on the survey and questions 2, 3, 9 and 10 on the semi-structured interview were focused on this research question. Several demographic questions were asked as part of the survey. They were asked in order to discover if such factors had any kind of impact on the effectiveness of discipleship in local contexts. The questions used to help answer the third research question are listed below.

Survey Questions:

#2: How would you describe your church setting?

#3: What is the size of your congregation (average Sunday worship attendance)?

#4: How long have you been in pastoral ministry?

#5: How long have you pastored at your current church?

#6: Describe your highest level of ministerial education.

#10: Which barrier below is the most significant barrier that you face in your current setting in helping people grow spiritually?

#17: In scripture, the apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews allude to both spiritual infancy (characterized by ignorance and/or self-centeredness) and spiritual maturity (characterized by God-centeredness and other-centeredness), and they imply that helping people to maturity is what we should be about in discipleship. They also imply that there

is sometimes the problem of believers not growing out of spiritual infancy. What percentage of your parishioners would you consider are spiritually mature?

#18: What percentage of your parishioners would you consider are in spiritual infancy?

#19: What percentage of your parishioners would say are making other disciples?

#20: What percentage of your parishioners would you say embody the Nazarene core value of holiness (Christlikeness)?

#21: What percentage of your parishioners would you say embody the Nazarene core value of missional?

Interview questions:

#2: How would you describe the state of discipleship in our denomination?

#3: How would you describe the state of discipleship in your current ministry setting? To whatever degree the state of discipleship in your church is different from the denomination, what are the reasons for the differences and/or similarities?

#9: What do you see as the biggest challenge to North American Nazarene pastors in accomplishing our mission of “making Christlike disciples in the nations”?

#10: Are there any questions that I haven’t asked that you think are essential to improving the way we go about discipleship as Nazarenes?

Ministry Context(s) for Observing the Phenomenon

The Church of the Nazarene has a significant presence in Middle Tennessee with 61 churches being present in the three primary geographical regions of the Metro Nashville area, the Clarksville area, and the Columbia area. While all three of these city centers are considered more urban, all three geographical areas also have significant suburban and rural

settings a part of their geography. Thus, many of the churches evaluated in this study are found in rural and suburban settings.

Middle Tennessee is very much a part of the “Bible Belt” of the South, which means that the region is characterized by a strong conservative, evangelical Protestantism. Also, church attendance in the “Bible Belt” region is generally higher than the national average. These factors are important to know and may be important in the understanding of how some churches and pastors understand the meaning and goal of discipleship.

Participants to Be Sampled About the Phenomenon

Criteria for Selection

As a lead pastor in the Church of the Nazarene in Middle Tennessee, I wanted to narrow my research to pastors who are in the same trenches of ministry that I find myself in currently. In order to begin to think of improving the effectiveness of discipleship in my own local context, I decided that surveying and interviewing colleagues that I am regularly engaging in relationships with (as well as collaborative ministry endeavors) would give a heightened level of quality and contextualization to the purpose and application of my research.

Description of Participants

The participants in this study were all senior pastors of local churches. Surveys were sent out to all pastors of the 61 pastors in Middle Tennessee. All of the pastors were male excluding two co-pastoring married couples. Both the husbands and wives were invited to participate in the survey as well as the interview. Of the 61 pastors, two are Korean pastors of Korean-speaking congregations, two are Hispanic pastors of Spanish speaking congregations, and two are African-American pastors of African-American congregations.

The remaining pastors are White/Anglo pastors of predominantly White/Anglo churches. It is important to note that the Korean and Hispanic pastors could speak English as well so that participation in the research project was possible.

Ethical Considerations

As this research project engaged human subjects, it was important to take the necessary steps to receive consent from all participants in this research as well as to maintain confidentiality. Each participant in the research was required to sign a letter of consent or verbally give consent over the phone to participate in an interview. For those who participated in the survey, each participant had to click “yes” on a forced consent question on the survey via Survey Monkey in order to complete the survey.

In order to maintain confidentiality, all surveys were stored on Survey Monkey, which is a secure online program. The only way to access the surveys were through the researcher’s password-protected account login. The surveys themselves asked no personal information that would breach confidentiality.

In regard to the interviews with each participant, all information that was recorded with a digital recorder was kept secure in a locked safe when not being utilized for the purposes of data analysis. Also, all recordings and transcripts of the interviews were done in such a way that the participant was not named in the recording or on the transcripts. Each interviewee was assigned a predetermined number in order to safeguard confidentiality. The predetermined number of each participant was kept in a separate file on the researcher’s password protected laptop as well as a hardcopy list that was stored in a locked safe in my office.

Procedure for Collecting Evidence from Participants

For this research project, a mixed methodological approach was utilized in order to collect the necessary data. The research was a pre-intervention project that was qualitative in nature although a statistician was needed to help process the information from the surveys. In Sensing's work *Qualitative Research*, he quotes Michael Patton as saying, "There is no recipe or formula in making methods decisions" (61). While this may be true, utilizing more than one instrument makes for a richer research design in terms of quality.

With this in mind, two instruments were utilized in this project: a twenty one-question survey and a ten question semi-structured interview. The single concept and goal of evaluating the effectiveness of discipleship was the focus of this project. For both the survey and the interviews, purposive samples were used. The survey was sent to all 61 pastors of Nazarene churches in the Middle Tennessee area. Among those who participated in the survey, 30 were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview. The 30 who were invited to participate in the interview were a purposive sample group as well. Fifteen of the thirty invited to participate in an interview were pastors of churches under 100 in regular weekly worship attendance. The rationale for this was because the majority of the 61 churches average fewer than 100 in weekly worship attendance. The breakdown of the other fifteen pastors invited to participate in an interview was as follows: five in congregations over 500 in weekly worship attendance, five in congregations of 100-250 in weekly worship attendance, and five in congregations of 251-500 in weekly worship attendance. This breakdown provided an opportunity to compare findings between churches of different sizes.

The rationale for the use of the survey was to find out from the larger sample of pastors how they described and understood discipleship as well as provide evaluation of the effectiveness of discipleship in their local contexts. The rationale for the semi-structured interview was to have an opportunity to probe deeper with pastors their thoughts on the effectiveness of discipleship. Thus, the semi-structured interview narrowed the focus of the interview, but it also allowed freedom to ask follow up questions that arose based off of the interviewee's responses to the predetermined questions. The choice of the semi-structured interview provided much more depth to the quality of this research project.

Procedure for Analyzing the Evidence Collected

Ellen Taylor-Powell and Marcus Renner's article *Analyzing Qualitative Data* was heavily utilized in terms of data analysis. The data analysis started with the surveys, as they were the first component to the data collection. Survey Monkey allowed a print-out of a compiled set of results that was produced under the "Analyze your results" tab. This document offered descriptive analysis of the preset responses to the survey questions including percentage responses to each question. This print out also included individualized responses to questions where participants were able to expound or offer an alternative response to the provided responses on the survey. Notes were added as the data was analyzed to develop a code of responses to the individualized responses. Common themes from the survey were detected and highlighted on the document. The themes provided a list of "preset categories" that were used for the second step of analysis on the interview transcriptions, which paved way for many more "emergent categories" (Taylor-Powell and Renner 3).

Similar work was done with interviews. Detailed transcriptions were made after listening. These were similarly analyzed by notating hard copies and beginning to code common themes that had been discovered from the surveys. There were also several themes that emerged from the interviews. Specific quotes unique to each individual were highlighted and a second document was created that gathered all of the answers from various individuals to each question in one place. This document was also coded and notated. Reoccurrence of themes was much easier to detect in this format, and previously undetected repetition emerged. This allowed an opportunity to revisit the handwritten interview notes to check for missed observation or data.

Finally, a summary form was created with a list of the common themes that were stated in both the surveys and interviews. Upon completing this component of qualitative analysis, a statistician assisted in quantitative analysis. She provided help with descriptive statistical analysis, summarized in Chapter 4, and she ran chi-square tests on the various survey categories. A chi-square test was done on each demographic question (questions 2-6) with the rest of the other 19 survey questions (including the other demographic questions). These chi-square tests yielded several significant findings that are shown in Chapter 4.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

A mixed methodological approach was used in this research project to give a “thicker” interpretation. As Sensing says, “Any single approach will have limitations. Subsequently, triangulation (multiple data-collection technologies designed to measure a single concept or construct) provides a complex view of the intervention enabling a ‘thicker’ interpretation” (72). Thus, the two tools of a survey and a semi-structured

interview were utilized in this project design to increase both the reliability and validity of the research.

In terms of reporting the data in this research project, descriptive analysis and quoting was regularly utilized to help provide the thicker description that Sensing alludes to above. Sensing quotes Patton as saying, “Sufficient descriptions and direct quotations should be included to allow the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented in the report” (209). This project design’s inclusion of interviews and surveys that included open-ended questions paved the way for valid and reliable qualitative research. As Sensing says, “Description and quoting from interviews, questionnaires, and transcripts is the foundation of qualitative research” (209).

The feedback from a dissertation coach throughout the editing process acted as peer debriefing as well as providing an outsider’s perspective, two of the tools that Sensing suggested increased validity and reliability of the research. Also, due to the delimitations of the research project, prolonged engagement was also a component of reliability and validity. The researcher has served in the same region as a senior pastor for three and a half years, and as an associate pastor for five years, and thus relationships and observations have been going on for over eight years. As Sensing says, “However, because DMin students have already served for months, if not years, in the field of study in question, DMin researches do meet the criteria and rationale for prolonged engagement by the nature of their relationship with context in question” (224).

Review of the Chapter

This chapter offered a detailed description of the design of this research project. It provided the rationale of the project, the purpose of the project, and the method of

determining the participants in the project. Next, it explained the mixed methodological approach that was used in order to collect data as well as providing a detailed account of how the data was analyzed. Finally, a statement was given about the measures that were taken in order to ensure that this research design was reliable and valid.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, an analysis of the data collected from both surveys and interviews will be given. The data collected provided answers to the three research questions asked in this project. It was the goal of the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of discipleship in Nazarene churches according to the perspective of the current pastors of these churches. The stated problem of a lack of discipleship happening in North American churches according to the personal experience of the researcher and corroborated by the review of literature led to the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of discipleship in other Nazarene churches. The goal of the research was to better identify the nature and causes of the problem as well as to discover some of the discipleship practices and methodologies that are proving effective in certain contexts.

Participants

All thirty of the pastors who completed the survey were male. One Hispanic pastor and one Korean pastor filled out the survey. The remaining 28 were Anglo/White. Forty percent of the pastors reported that they were currently pastoring in a rural/farming community. A little over a third of the pastors were currently ministering in a suburban environment. Just over sixteen percent of the pastors were ministering in an urban/inner city area. Two pastors described their setting as a small town but not quite rural. The remaining pastor described his setting as a small town close to a large city but not quite suburban.

The pastors ranged in ages between 25 and 75. Church sizes of those who filled out the survey ranged from 25 in weekly attendance to over 600 in weekly attendance.

Just over 50% of the pastors who were surveyed reported that their church averaged 100 or less in Sunday worship attendance. Three of the thirty pastors reported that they were bi-vocational. Table 1 of demographics provides further detail of the survey participants.

Of the thirty pastors who took the survey, sixteen of them also participated in a face-to-face interview. All who participated in the interview were Anglo/White and ranged in age from 30 to 66. In regard to Sunday morning worship attendance, eight of the pastors reported fewer than 100. Four reported between 200-300. Three reported over 500. Finally, one reported between 100-200 in Sunday morning worship attendance. Table 2 below shows further demographics of those who participated in the face-to-face interview.

Table 1.1		
<i>Demographics of Survey Participants</i>		
	Control	
Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	30	100
Female	0	0
Race		
Anglo/White	28	93.33
Korean	1	3.33
Hispanic	1	3.33
Education		
Den. Course of Stu.	4	13.33
Bachelor's degree	8	26.67
Master's degree	13	43.33
Doctoral degree	5	16.67
Congregational Size		
0-50	11	36.67
51-100	5	16.67
101-200	5	16.67
201-400	5	16.67
401-600	2	6.67
Over 600	2	6.67
Church setting		
Rural or farming	12	40
Urban/inner city	5	5
Suburban	11	36.67
Small town/other	2	6.67
How Long Pastoring		
2-4 years	1	3.33
5-9 years	4	13.33
10+ years	25	83.33
How Long Pastoring in current setting		
0-1years	4	13.33
2-4 years	9	30
5-9 years	6	20
10+ years	11	36.67

Table 1.2		
<i>Demographics of Interview Participants</i>		
	Control	
Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	16	100
Female	0	0
Race		
Anglo/White	16	100
Korean	0	0
Hispanic	0	0
Education		
Den. Course of Stu.	0	0
Bachelor's degree	4	25
Master's degree	9	56.25
Doctoral degree	3	18.75
Congregational Size		
0-50	6	37.5
51-100	2	12.5
101-200	1	6.25
201-400	4	25
401-600	2	12.5
Over 600	1	6.25
Church setting		
Rural or farming	5	31.25
Urban/inner city	2	12.5
Suburban	7	43.75
Small town/other	2	12.5
How Long Pastoring		
2-4 years	0	0
5-9 years	1	6.25
10+ years	15	93.75
How Long Pastoring in current setting		
0-1years	3	18.75
2-4 years	5	31.25
5-9 years	2	12.5
10+ years	6	37.5

Research Question 1: Description of Evidence

Research Question 1: How is discipleship and the goal of discipleship understood by pastors of Nazarene churches on the MidSouth District Church of the Nazarene?

The first research question was asked in order to discover the degree of unity and/or diversity in the understanding of the meaning and goal of discipleship among pastors who participated in this research project. In the survey, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following definition of discipleship, given by the researcher:

“discipleship is the process by which the church (corporately and individually) teaches and leads others to grow in Christlikeness.” Respondents had four options as shown on the survey provided in appendix D. Of the four options, only two were selected. Twenty six of the responders said yes, while four responded with “yes, but it could be better and this is how.” The following chart provides a descriptive statistical analysis of this survey question.

Table 2.1 – Discipleship Definition One definition of discipleship is the following: “Discipleship is the process by which the church (corporately and individually) teaches and leads others to grow in Christlikeness.” Would you consider this an acceptable working definition of discipleship?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	26	86.7	86.7	86.7
	Yes, but it could be better and this is how (please use the comment field below to explain):	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Of the four responders who provided suggestions to make the definition better, two did not care for the language of “process.” For example, one of the two said, “I don’t like the word ‘process.’ It is too cold. Discipleship happens best in relationship.” The other said, “Discipleship is a relationship. The above definition seems to promote a top-down understanding of discipleship. Discipleship is more of an apprenticeship, where one walks with the other guiding them in the ways of Christ.”

The other two responders offered further rationale of how the provided definition could be better. One said, “(the definition) needs to make sure that there is an understanding that being a disciple and being a follower are one in the same and that disciples are about reproducing other disciples.” The other stated, “Replacing ourselves as followers is important. Therefore, discipleship is transformation to Christlikeness in mind and heart, which is displayed in outward signs of actions, deeds, repentance, and disciplines.”

The rationales for improving the definition of discipleship on the survey yielded a few of the recurring themes that were also raised during face-to-face interviews. The interviews provided a much more robust understanding of how discipleship is understood. Interviewees were asked to give their own definition of discipleship. Analysis of the interview transcriptions yielded three major recurring themes in regard to the definition and goal of discipleship.

Relational/Relationship

The emphasis that discipleship was first and foremost about a relationship was by far the most significant and repeated theme. Even when some pastors did not specifically use the word relationship, the concept of relationship was alluded to in all of the

interviews. For example, one pastor defined discipleship as “the passing down of wisdom from a mature believer to a less mature believer.” Although this pastor never used the word ‘relationship’, he shared several stories about young men that he has discipled. He went on to describe his method of discipling guys “one lunch at a time.”

Other pastors spoke of the “relational” theme in very specific ways. One pastor when asked to define discipleship simply said, “Relationship first.” He went on to speak of many relationships that he has as a pastor with his parishioners and people in the community. Another pastor while speaking to the question of how discipleship is defined said, “Relationships are huge.” A third pastor defined discipleship as “entering into a relationship of disciplined learning.”

Christlikeness

The theme of Christlikeness was directly voiced by at least half of the interviewees. One pastor defined discipleship as “teaching people to live like Christ.” Another pastor defined discipleship as “helping people be formed in the faith so that they embody Christlikeness.” Another defined it as “calling people from where they are toward Christlikeness.” Yet another defined discipleship as “all things that help us learn to become more like Christ.” The goal of Christlikeness was clearly articulated as an essential component to the definition of discipleship.

Teacher/Learner

As can be seen above, the teacher/learner theme has already been voiced in some of the definitions that emphasized relationship and/or Christlikeness. While some pastors simple used the language of teaching and learning in order to emphasize the importance of relationship or the importance of Christlikeness, other pastors specifically put

emphasis on these two concepts of teaching and learning. For example, one pastor when asked to define discipleship said, “to be a disciple is to be a learner. Then discipleship is learnership.” Another pastor when asked to define discipleship said, “Two different words: discipline and learning. Discipleship is entering into a relationship where there is disciplined learning.” The relationship theme is voiced, but the emphasis is on the learning theme.

One of the pastors who emphasized the relational theme simultaneously emphasized the teacher/learner theme. When offering a further explanation of his definition on discipleship, he said, “A disciple is a student. Anytime there is a student, there is a teacher.” This pastor then reemphasized the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the student.

Research Question 2: Description of Evidence

Research Question 2: What are some of the best practices being utilized by these churches that are leading people toward maturity in Christ?

The second research question was asked in order to discover some of the best discipleship practices being utilized by churches that are leading people toward maturity in Christ.

The first question on the survey addressing this research question was question 8, which stated, “In your current ministry setting, which of the following discipleship environments is the most fruitful in helping people grow spiritually?” As can be seen, just over 43% of the participants selected “small groups of approximately 10-12 people.” The remaining results to this question can be seen in the following chart.

Table 2.2 – Most Fruitful Environment In your current ministry setting, which of the following discipleship environments is the most fruitful in helping people grow spiritually?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	One-on-one discipleship	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Other (please specify)	6	20.0	20.0	26.7
	Small groups of approximately 10-12 people	13	43.3	43.3	70.0
	Smaller accountability groups of approximately 3-4 people	3	10.0	10.0	80.0
	Sunday school	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

As can be seen in the chart above, the second highest percentage response was shared by the two categories of “Sunday school” and “other (please specify).” In response to the category of “other,” one pastor stated, “There is not a single setting where people are the most fruitful in developing...all of our settings are logically unified.” He went on to suggest that all discipleship settings work together to be help people grow spiritually. In similar fashion, one pastor said, “All of the above.” Another pastor gave equal weight to small groups of 10-12 people and one-on-one environments. One pastor said, “We only have Sunday school, but I wouldn’t describe it as fruitful.” Finally, one pastor stated,

Our primary model for discipleship involves equipping and sending people to participate in God’s redemptive mission in our community and in our world. We believe that discipleship is done “one the way” much as it was for Jesus’ first disciples. They participated in his redemptive work in the world, and by participating in that work, they were formed as disciples.

This pastor had been in his current ministry setting for over ten years and suggested that this method of missional discipleship has taken years to cultivate, but to his delight, he suggested that a high percentage of his parishioners do embody this missional discipleship, especially within their community.

Another question on the survey asked, “Do you utilize any tools for measuring spiritual growth in others?” Seventy percent of the respondents said no, while thirty percent said yes. Those who responded yes were asked to describe briefly any tool or methodology that they utilize. The major tool or methodology mentioned was observation. One pastor referred to the use of a spiritual gifts evaluation. Another pastor uses an annual self-evaluation survey that parishioners are encouraged to fill out. The remaining seven pastors simply use the methodology of observing.

When observing, three of the seven pastors look for the fruit of the Spirit. One looks to see whether parishioners move into some kind of leadership role. Another pastor looks for level of interest in ministry, a willingness to serve, financial giving, and involvement in worship. Finally, another looks at tithing, a willingness to share life with others, and an engagement in works of piety and works of mercy.

Two additional questions were asked on the survey to discover best practices that churches are utilizing to help people grow as disciples. The first of the two questions asked was the following: “Are there specific practices or programs that your church utilizes to help disciples know how to make other disciples?” Half of the pastors said yes and half said no. The second question was, “Are there specific practices or programs that you church utilizes to develop spiritual leaders (those who help others move from where they are spiritually to where God wants them to be)?” Forty percent of the pastors said yes. Sixty percent said no.

In addition to asking these questions on the survey, several interview questions were asked as well about discipleship environments and practices that help people grow spiritually. Pastors described the current state of discipleship in their church. They

described environments that were most effective in cultivating spiritual growth and offered a rationale as to why these environments were so effective. Pastors were also asked to describe their strategy of how to get people into these effective environments.

Interviewees were also asked how they measured spiritual growth in their parishioners, how they helped cultivate pure hearts and mature characters, how they helped people better embody the core value of missional, and how they helped people know how to make other disciples. As the surveys and transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed, several recurring themes surfaced.

Serving

The most often repeated theme throughout the interviews was by far the theme of service. Nearly every pastor voiced the theme of serving multiple times throughout the interviews in the responses to both the survey questions and interview questions about discipleship practices and environments that help people grow spiritually. When asked what practices were utilized to help disciples know how to make other disciples, one pastor said, “We always have ministry opportunities to encourage people to participate in.” Another pastor answered the same question this way: “serving as a small group and as a church.” One pastor said that one of the main parts of the job of pastors is “Calling people into service and finding ways in which they are gifted and using it for the Lord.” Another pastor said, “Serving Christ together teaches us a lot and we learn a lot. This is a key component to growth.”

When asked which environments are most effective at cultivating spiritual growth, one pastor offered a unique insight by saying, “Outside the church campus and the gathered life of the church.” When asked why these environments were so effective,

the pastor replied, “They are so effective because the Spirit is already there at work. The least and last are already out there and that is where the Spirit is already at work and calls us to join him. People can’t reach real maturity in the confines of a classroom.” This pastor’s conviction was that new people are always invited to come and serve even if they do not yet believe. As this pastor stated, “Sometimes people become before they believe or belong before they believe. Everyone is different in how they grow.”

Echoing the same sentiments, another pastor answered the same question about which environments are most effective at cultivating spiritual growth by suggesting, “With the serving opportunities of sheltering and feeding the homeless and hungry, they are so true to the gospel of Christ. They are effective because it is essential to Christ’s mission.” This pastor went on to suggest that he models service for his people and continually invites his parishioners to join him. A couple of pastors specifically said, “I measure how many people are serving,” when asked how they measure spiritual growth. Another pastor said he looks at whether or not people are willing to serve. Another, when asked the same question, said, “Personally, I measure by what I see, their interest in serving. Serving is a big measurement. If people aren’t interested in serving, there is not much growth taking place.” Another pastor said, “I measure spiritual growth based on their faithfulness in worship and willingness to serve.”

Climate matters

While small groups and Sunday school were mentioned frequently as effective discipleship environments, what surfaced as important was not so much the actual environment as much as it was about the climate of trust within the environment. One pastor said, “Transparency is a big key with discipleship.” Another pastor described the

setting of their Sunday school classes as such: “Vulnerability and connectivity are great in these classes...there is room to express doubt in these classes.” This pastor saw these climate issues as crucial to spiritual growth. Another pastor echoed the idea that what is effective about the Sunday school classes is that there is a “willingness to discuss questions.”

Another pastor added to the concept of transparency by connecting it to the need for confession. He said, “I try to be perhaps to a fault, transparent before my people...and I have to confess and ask for forgiveness.” This pastor went on to suggest that he must model this transparency for his people. In addition to transparency, one pastor articulated, “The only path toward healing is to be honest, and we must be able to speak freely and know that we won’t get hurt by sharing it.” This pastor talked about the importance of people feeling safe regardless of the setting.

Mentoring/Modeling

Several pastors specifically highlighted the importance of the mentoring relationship in discipleship. While only two of the pastors on the survey suggested that one-on-one discipleship was most fruitful in cultivating spiritual growth, the interviews made it clear that mentoring is a key component to effective discipleship. For example, one pastor’s response to the question of which environments are most effective at cultivating spiritual growth simply responded, “The only discipleship that I can say that I see happening is meeting one on one with this young man every week.”

Another pastor suggested that one-on-one discipleship was most effective in his context but he gave another rationale for why it was so effective. Comparing it to small groups, he stated, “In small groups, it is easy to get off the focal point. With one or two,

you stay on topic.” He went on to add that one on one relationship made it “easy to stay on point and be focused on the relationship.” This pastor later expounded on the idea that disciples must grow academically and relationally. The relational component however outweighed the academic component for him.

Another pastor emphasized the importance and effectiveness of mentoring by suggesting, “The point of mentoring is that a connection develops that sticks and that happens when intimacy is established.” He went on to say, “People can be here for three years and not be changed much at all because no intimacy ever happened.” This pastor sees the connection of mentoring and the important component of an environment where intimacy can happen. This pastor’s conviction was that intimacy best happens in these mentoring relationships.

Intentionality

Many pastors echoed the theme of intentionality throughout the interviews. While the general consensus of the pastors was that there is a need and desire to be more intentional in discipleship, the awareness of the importance was significant among many of the pastors. When asked to describe the current state of discipleship in their current ministry setting, one pastor simply reported, “We are good, but we could be better. We could be more intentional.” Another pastor answered the same question by stating, “Weak. I don’t have a program that intentionally disciplines people.”

Preaching/Worship service

Another recurring theme was that of the importance of preaching and the worship service in the discipleship process. One pastor while answering the question of which environments are most effective at cultivating spiritual growth said, “The Sunday

morning worship service...I see spiritual growth in people that aren't involved in anything beyond the worship service." Another pastor answered the same question this way: "To be honest, the most spiritual growth is happening in the morning worship service." This pastor went on to suggest some growth is happening in Sunday school, but by and large, he sees the worship service as being most effective at cultivating spiritual growth.

One pastor when asked how he helps cultivate a pure heart and mature character in his parishioners said, "People sitting under the proclamation of the word...there just isn't much substitute for that." He went on to suggest that the people who are really leaning in to listen to the word are growing. Another pastor answered the same question by saying, "In our preaching and teaching, there must be an emphasis on a pure heart." For these pastors, preaching and teaching from the pulpit are key components to helping people grow spiritually.

When asked specifically about what practices are utilized to help people embody the core value of missional, two pastors said, "through preaching." One of these two pastors gave the same answer when asked about what practices he utilizes to help his people know how to make other disciples. Preaching for several of the pastors is one of the key methods of helping people become a more faithful and effective disciple.

Observation

Not only did many of the pastors use the language of observation, it was clear from the research that it was the primary way that pastors measured spiritual growth in parishioners. As stated earlier, pastors look for many different behaviors that are indicators of spiritual growth. One pastor shared a story of observing on particular

parishioner over the course of several years. He said, “the things you were battling a year ago, you may be continuing to battle but maybe are a few steps further down the road.”

One pastor said that the way he measures spiritual growth is by observation, but he quickly followed up his response by saying, “The problem with that being the only measure is that I will inevitably miss things.” He elaborated by saying that he probably measures a lot by assumption which he admittedly said is a terrible way to measure.

One pastor when asked how he measures spiritual growth in others simply stated, “By what they turn around and do.” He elaborated by saying, “I look for changes in the way they talk and what they are interested in.” This pastor suggested, “We must talk more about changes in speech and behavior. People can do gospel work and still sometimes struggle with reactive language. But their proactive language has changed...they are serving others, doing gospel work, and in time, the reactive language will change.” This pastor bridges together the two themes of observation and serving.

In the midst of one interview, the researcher asked the question, “How do you know when a Christlike disciple has been made?” The pastor, after pausing for a few moments, responded, “We know we have made one when we see them make one.” In essence, this pastor is observing whether or not disciples are making other disciples. This observation is a key indicator for this pastor as to whether or not discipleship is being done effectively.

Pastoral Longevity

One pastor suggested that one of the main reasons he thinks that his church is doing a better job at discipleship than a majority of churches is due to pastoral longevity. He has been pastoring his church for nearly 15 years. Before he arrived, the church

already had their own program and strategy for discipleship, but over time, he has helped them move to what he would describe as a more biblically based form of discipleship.

Another pastor when asked to describe the state of discipleship in his current setting said, “Probably better and at a higher level than it has ever been, but probably because I have been here for 22 years...I am old enough to be able to sort through what is important.”

When asked about practices that help people know how to make other disciples, one pastor mentioned the importance of pastoral longevity as crucial to helping disciples mature. His conviction is that it takes a long time to make a disciple who will then in turn make another disciple. For this pastor, pastoral longevity is crucial for this process to be effective and fruitful.

Correlations

In order to determine whether or not there were correlations between different variables in the survey, the researcher consulted professional help from a statistician who ran Pearson Chi-Square tests to discover any correlations between the demographic variables and the remaining questions about discipleship practices, environments, and spiritual descriptors of parishioners. The tables below will show the seven significant findings that the Chi-Square tests yielded.

Table 3.1 – Significant Correlation 1						
Descriptive Statistics for total years in ministry and which discipleship environment is most fruitful?						
		Years in Pastoral Ministry				
		2-9 Years		10+ Years		
Most fruitful		n	%		n	%
One-on-one discipleship		2	40.0		0	0.0
Small accountability groups of 3-4		0	0.0		3	12.0
Small groups of 10-12		1	20.0		12	48.0
Sunday school		0	0.0		6	24.0
Other		2	40.0		4	16.0

Table 3.2 - Chi-Square Tests for Table 3.1			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.754 ^a	4	.008
Likelihood Ratio	12.345	4	.015
N of Valid Cases	30		
a. 7 cells (70.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.			

Table 4.1 Significant Correlation 2						
Descriptive Statistics for total years in pastoral ministry and how many years the environment in Table 1 has been offered in the current ministry setting?						
		Years in Pastoral Ministry				
		2-9 Years		10+ Years		
Years offered		n	%		n	%
0-1		0	0.0		2	8.0
2-4		4	80.0		1	4.0
5-9		0	0.0		9	36.0
10-20		0	0.0		6	24.0
20+		1	20.0		7	28.0

Table 4.2 Chi-Square Tests for Table 4.1			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.940 ^a	4	.001
Likelihood Ratio	16.001	4	.003
N of Valid Cases	30		
a. 7 cells (70.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.			

Table 5.1 – Significant Correlation 3						
Descriptive Statistics for total years in pastoral ministry and what percentage of your parishioners (current setting) embody the Nazarene core value of holiness (Christlikeness)?						
		Years in Pastoral Ministry				
		2-9 Years			10+ Years	
Percentage of parishioners		n	%		n	%
0-20%		0	0.0		5	20.8
21-40%		1	20.0		15	62.5
41-60%		1	20.0		4	16.7
61-80%		3	60.0		0	0.0

Table 5.2 Chi-Square Tests for Table 5.1			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.823 ^a	3	.001
Likelihood Ratio	14.177	3	.003
N of Valid Cases	29		
a. 7 cells (87.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .52.			

Table 6.1 – Significant Correlation 4						
Descriptive Statistics for total years in pastoral ministry and what percentage of your parishioners (current setting) embodies the Nazarene core value of missional?						
		Years in Pastoral Ministry				
		2-9 Years			10+ Years	
Percentage of parishioners		n	%		n	%
0-20%		1	20.0		8	33.3
21-40%		0	0.0		10	41.7
41-60%		1	20.0		5	20.8
61-80%		2	40.0		1	4.2
81-100%		1	20.0		0	0.0

Table 6.2			
Chi-Square Tests for Table 6.1			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.258 ^a	4	.016
Likelihood Ratio	11.157	4	.025
N of Valid Cases	29		
a. 8 cells (80.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .17.			

Table 7.1 – Significant Correlation 5									
Descriptive Statistics for total years at current church and how long the church has offered the fruitful environment in Table 1?									
	Years at Current Church								
	0-1		2-4		5-9		10+		
Years offered	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
0-1 years	2	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
2-4 years	1	25.0	4	44.4	1	16.7	0	0.0	
5-9 years	0	0.0	1	11.1	2	33.3	6	54.5	
10-20 years	1	25.0	0	0.0	2	33.3	3	27.3	
20+ years	0	0.0	4	44.4	1	16.7	2	18.2	

Table 7.2			
Chi-Square Tests for Table 7.1			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.435 ^a	12	.005
Likelihood Ratio	27.351	12	.007
N of Valid Cases	30		
a. 20 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .27.			

Table 8.1 –Significant Correlation 6											
Descriptive Statistics for highest level of ministerial education and the question “which environment in your current setting that is most fruitful?”											
		Highest Level of Ministerial Education									
		Bachelor's			Master's			Doctoral			Naz./Other
Most fruitful		n	%		n	%		n	%		n %
One-on-one discipleship		0	0.0		0	0.0		0	0.0		2 50.0
Small accountability groups of 3-4		0	0.0		3	23.1		0	0.0		0 0.0
Small groups of 10-12		4	50.0		3	23.1		5	100.0		1 25.0
Sunday school		3	37.5		3	23.1		0	0.0		0 0.0
Other		1	12.5		4	30.8		0	0.0		1 25.0

Table 8.2			
Chi-Square Tests for Table 8.1			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.367 ^a	12	.007
Likelihood Ratio	25.287	12	.014
N of Valid Cases	30		
a. 19 cells (95.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .27.			

Table 9.1 - Significant Correlation 7											
Descriptive Statistics for highest level of ministerial education and the question “are there specific practices or programs that your church utilizes to help disciples know how to make disciples?”											
	Highest Level of Ministerial Education										
	Bachelor's			Master's			Doctoral			Naz./Other	
Response	n	%		n	%		n	%		n	%
Yes	3	37.5		4	30.8		5	100.0		3	75.0
No	5	62.5		9	69.2		0	0.0		1	25.0

Table 9.2			
Chi-Square Tests for Table 9.1			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.423 ^a	3	.038
Likelihood Ratio	10.457	3	.015
N of Valid Cases	30		
a. 6 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.00.			

As can be seen in the tables, the statistically significant findings had to do with correlations made between the three variables of total years in pastoral ministry, years pastoring in the current context, and education with other variables. Four of the significant findings had to do with the variable of total years in pastoral ministry. One finding had to do with the variable of years pastoring in the current context. The remaining two findings had to do with the variable of education.

The first correlation that yielded significance was that of years in pastoral ministry and question #8 in the survey, which stated, “In your current ministry setting, which of the following discipleship environments is the most fruitful in helping people

grow spiritually. Table 3.1 gives the full details of the results. Nearly half of those in pastoral ministry for ten or more years saw small groups of 10-12 people as the most fruitful. The next highest percentage was in the category of Sunday school with just below 25% of pastors in ministry ten or more years. Interestingly, none of the five pastors who had been in ministry 2-9 years selected Sunday school as the most fruitful, and only one of the five selected small groups as the most fruitful. It is important to note that the “other (please specify)” category in Crosstab Table 1 yielded a variety of responses from the six individuals who selected that option, most notably the response of “all of the above” for the two pastors who have been pastoring 2-9 years. So, while small groups may have not been selected as the most fruitful for a few pastors, they still saw small groups as one of many fruitful environments for discipleship.

The second significant correlation as seen in Crosstab Table 2 above is intimately related to the above correlation as it was about the particular environment deemed most fruitful. The correlation was between years in pastoral ministry and how long the most fruitful environment for discipleship had been offered in the church. The strongest percentage was that 80% of those pastoring between 2-9 years said that the most fruitful environment for discipleship in their church had only been offered between 2-4 years. The next highest percentage of respondents (36%) as seen in this table was from those who had been pastoring ten years or more and said that the most fruitful environment had only been offered 5-9 years in their current context.

The third significant correlation as seen in Crosstab Table 3 was between years in pastoral ministry and the question, “What percentage of your parishioners would you say embody the Nazarene core value of holiness (Christlikeness)? As can be seen, the

majority (62.5%) of pastors who had been in pastoral ministry 10 or more years selected between 21-40% whereas the majority (although a smaller amount of pastors in this category) of those who had been pastoring 2-9 years selected between 61-80%. Also, it is significant that just over 80% of the pastors with ten or more years of ministry experience (just over 70% of the total pastors surveyed) selected 0-20% or 21-40%.

The fourth significant correlation as seen in Crosstab Table 4 was between years in pastoral ministry and the question, “What percentage of your parishioners would you say embody the Nazarene core value of missional?” As can be seen, the majority (75%) of pastors with ten or more years of pastoral ministry experience selected either 0-20% or 21-40% of their parishioners, with the percentage being slightly higher (41.7%) in the category of 21-40% of parishioners embodying the core value of missional. Conversely, four of the five pastors who had 2-9 years of pastoral ministry experience selected above 41% of their parishioners who embodied the core value of missional.

The fifth significant finding found in Crosstab Table 5 was between the variable of how long you have pastored in your current church and how long the most fruitful discipleship environment had been offered in the current ministry setting. Thus, it is related to Crosstab Table 2, but the breakdown of ministry years is different due a greater diversity of responses on years served in the current ministry setting. As can be seen, two of the four pastors who had been in their ministry setting under a year selected that the most fruitful discipleship environment setting has only existed under a year. Another significant statistic is seen in that 54.5% of the pastors who have been in their current ministry setting selected between 5-9 years that the most fruitful environment of discipleship had been offered. Likewise, 44.4% of the pastors who had been in their

current ministry setting for 2-4 years also selected that the most fruitful discipleship environment had been offered for 2-4 years.

The sixth significant finding found in Crosstab Table six was a correlation between the variables of the pastor's level of ministerial education and the question, "In your current ministry setting, which of the following discipleship environments is the most fruitful in helping people grow spiritually?" As can be seen, most of the highest percentages in the chart are in the column of small groups of approximately 10-12 people. Most notably, all five pastors who have a doctorate selected small groups of approximately 10-12 people. Also, only two pastors selected one-on-one discipleship and they both selected the denominational course of study as their highest level of ministerial education. Finally, the highest percentage (43.3%) of pastors in the total column reiterated the vitality of small groups of 10-12 people. The "small groups of approximately 10-12 people" column was the only column to have representation of pastors from all four educational levels.

The seventh and final significant finding can be seen in Crosstab Table 7. It showed a correlation between the variable of the highest level of ministerial education of the pastor with the question, "Are there specific practices or programs that your church utilizes to help disciples know how to make other disciples?" Interestingly, the responses of yes and no were even. Several statistics are worth highlighting. All those with a doctoral degree answered the question yes and three of the four pastors who had done the Nazarene course of study said yes as well. Conversely, nearly 70% of the pastors with a Master's degree and just over 60% of the pastors with a Bachelor's degree said that their

church does not utilize any practices or programs to help disciples know how to make other disciples.

Research Question 3: Description of Evidence

Research Question 3: What are some of the common barriers that the pastors of these churches face in helping their people grow spiritually?

The third research question was designed to identify the common barriers that the participants face in helping their people grow spiritually. Several questions on the survey as well as the interview were asked to get a more nuanced understanding of what pastors perceive and experience as barriers in helping people grow as disciples. The main question addressing this was: “Which barrier below is the most significant barrier that you face in your current setting in helping people grow spiritually?” The chart below provides a descriptive analysis of the survey results.

Table 2.3 – Most Significant Barrier					
Which barrier below is the most significant barrier that you face in your current setting in helping people grow spiritually?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lack of desire of parishioners to engage in discipleship.	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Lack of knowledge in knowing how to disciple others.	1	3.3	3.3	36.7
	Lack of spiritual leaders in my church.	5	16.7	16.7	53.3
	Lack of strong discipleship curriculum resources.	2	6.7	6.7	60.0
	Lack of time of parishioners to engage in discipleship.	7	23.3	23.3	83.3
	Other (please specify)	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

The largest percentage of respondents noted that a lack of desire of parishioners to engage in discipleship was the main barrier they faced. The second highest percentage of respondents suggested that a lack of time of parishioners to engage in discipleship was the most significant barrier. Of the five “other” responses, apathy of older leaders was mentioned; having enough leaders to invest in others was mentioned, and then three responders suggested that a combination of the above categories were equally significant barriers.

Before moving to the interview questions, the following tables show descriptive statistics of responses to the survey questions that asked pastors to give approximate percentages of their congregational members in regard to of spiritual maturity. Each table provides the question and the responses of pastors. Half of the pastors surveyed suggested that 21-40% of their parishioners were spiritually mature. Another 31% of the pastors suggested that 0-20% of their parishioners were spiritually mature. This is shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 – Spiritual Maturity Percentages

In scripture, the apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews allude to both spiritual infancy (characterized by ignorance and/or self-centeredness) and spiritual maturity (characterized by God-centeredness and other-centeredness), and they imply that helping people to maturity is what we should be about in discipleship. They also imply that there is sometimes the problem of believers not growing out of spiritual infancy.

What percentage of your parishioners would you consider are spiritually mature?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid					
	0-20%	9	31.03	31.03	31.03
	21-40%	15	51.72	51.72	82.75
	41-60%	4	13.79	13.79	96.54
	61-80%	1	3.45	3.45	100.0
	Total	29	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.5 - Spiritual Infancy Percentages

What percentage of your parishioners would you consider are in spiritual infancy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		3	10.0	10.0	10.0
	0-20%	4	13.3	13.3	23.3
	21-40%	9	30.0	30.0	53.3
	41-60%	9	30.0	30.0	83.3
	61-80%	3	10.0	10.0	93.3
	81-100%	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.6 – Disciples Making Disciples Percentages What percentage of your parishioners would you say are making other disciples?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	0-20%	24	80.0	80.0	83.3
	21-40%	4	13.3	13.3	96.7
	81-100%	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.7 – Holiness (Christlikeness) Percentages What percentage of your parishioners would you say embody the Nazarene core value of holiness (Christlikeness)?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	0-20%	5	16.7	16.7	20.0
	21-40%	16	53.3	53.3	73.3
	41-60%	5	16.7	16.7	90.0
	61-80%	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.8 – Missional Percentages What percentage of your parishioners would you say embody the Nazarene core value of missional?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	3.3	3.3	3.3
	0-20%	9	30.0	30.0	33.3
	21-40%	10	33.3	33.3	66.7
	41-60%	6	20.0	20.0	86.7
	61-80%	3	10.0	10.0	96.7
	81-100%	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

While these charts give some descriptive analysis to the spiritual state of the parishioners according to these pastors, the interviews gave a much broader understanding of these statistics. What these charts do show is that most of the churches have larger percentages of spiritual infants and smaller percentages of spiritually mature believers. The core values of holiness (Christlikeness) and missional are at the center of the Church of the Nazarene's understanding of what it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The charts show that the majority of parishioners in these churches are not embodying either of the core values of holiness or missional. It also shows that the majority of parishioners in these churches are not making others disciples.

A brief glance at these statistics point to the reality that there are barriers and obstacles to discipleship, some of which have already been alluded to. The pastors were asked this question while being interviewed: "What do you see as the biggest challenge to North American Nazarene pastors in accomplishing our mission of 'making Christlike disciples in the nations?'" Upon analyzing the transcriptions, a few recurring themes emerged.

Politics

Several pastors mentioned politics as one of the biggest challenges to discipleship. One pastor said, "We have made ourselves sound like we have aligned ourselves with a particular political bent." He went on to suggest that this is a significant barrier that he deals with regularly. Another pastor said, "One of the biggest challenges I think currently is that we don't know politically where our congregations are. It mostly revolves around the issue of homosexuality." A third pastor said this about politics: "They are so profoundly one sided in this area. It is vicious and mean. Some of the sweetest and

kindest people I know are vicious and mean and have no grace when people disagree with them politically. This is a minefield for pastors.” This pastor went on to say, “In my opinion, politics has the greatest potential to divide a congregation than anything else.”

Desire and Time

The survey highlighted a lack of desire to grow spiritually as the greatest barrier that pastors face in their local contexts. One pastor tied this lack of desire of parishioners to the consumer mentality of the culture. He said, “They see Christianity as a consumer...there is not a push or desire to go further than just showing up.” One pastor alluded to the desire barrier by suggesting that the biggest barrier to making Christlike disciples is apathy. He suggested that many people just don’t care to grow. He also suggested that many pastors are apathetic and have become content with maintaining the status quo.

Lack of spiritual leaders

One pastor’s immediate response to the greatest of the biggest challenge to discipleship was the following: “We don’t have mature disciples that we can look at, who can say, “Follow me.” They don’t have confidence, competence or character to do that...we have churches full of people who do church...they have been trained to show up but not trained to lead and lead others.” This same pastor went on to also identify something that only he of all the pastors mentioned as a significant barrier to discipleship. He said, “Hospitality is a lost art. Discipleship doesn’t happen in the classroom like can elsewhere. There has to be a recovery of hospitality if those kinds of relationships are going to happen.”

One pastor suggested that a reason there is a lack of spiritual leaders is related to the idea that we are not discipling our young people well. He said, “I think we fail to disciple our young people and that is why we lose so many of them when they turn 18. A lot of pizza and lock-ins give a faith that is easy to grow out of.”

Cultural influence

Many of the pastors alluded to cultural influences being significant barriers to discipleship. One pastor said, “American consumerism leads us to think that if we aren’t producing numbers, we are failures...if it doesn’t happen fast enough, we need to move on to a new place.” This pastor went on to describe the nature of pastoral ministry in terms of farming by saying, “God plants us in places of opposition sometimes. Our job is to stay there and allow fruit in time to come. We won’t ever find the ideal soil. The culture is always going to choke us as are trying to produce and be fruitful.”

Another pastor alluded to cultural influences when he said, “I think that greed and the spirit of consumerism is something that we are so caught up in. Another area of culture is the god of sports in our community.” He suggested that these barriers are tough issues that he faces on a regular basis. Two pastors speak of the cultural influences as causing us to lose our prophetic voice as pastors. One of the two said, “I think we have turned over our prophetic voice to society.” The other said, “Our prophetic role is to speak hard words, and no one likes hard words.” Another pastor stated, “One of the of the worst things is buying into our culture, both secular and church culture.” This pastor went on to share a story about his professor saying, “A church that pays all of its budgets make a good Nazarene church.” He said that his professor’s point is that the church belongs to a denominational culture that says this is an acceptable definition of a good church. This

same pastor goes on to suggest that the culture of individualism and patriotism are also huge barriers that he constantly faces.

Lack of know how

One pastor answered the question of the greatest challenge to discipleship for North American Nazarene pastors by saying, “a lack of formation, of how you make a disciple and what that looks like...we just don’t know.” Another pastor said, “We do a bad job of equipping...I think what happened to me is that I wasn’t taught how to equip. I would have liked to see more at the seminary level on what it means to equip a church and equip leaders. We need equipping materials.”

Summary of Major Findings

In doing both qualitative and quantitative analysis, several major findings surfaced.

1. Discipleship is understood primarily as a personal relationship with the intended goal of Christlikeness (spiritual maturity).
2. One of the most significant indicators that a person is growing spiritually is whether or not they are serving both inside and outside the walls of the church, but especially outside the walls of the church.
3. Small group environments are considered by the majority of the pastors who participated in this research to be the most fruitful environments for spiritual growth. However, regardless of the programmatic environment, the climate of that environment matters. The particular climate that matters is one that fosters things such as honesty, openness, vulnerability, and transparency.
4. Pastoral education and pastoral longevity have a significant impact on both the perceived effectiveness of discipleship as well as the actual practices of discipleship.
5. The greatest barrier to spiritual growth among the churches represented was that of desire and cultural influences.
6. The majority of parishioners in the churches represented are at best stuck in spiritual infancy are not making other disciples, nor embodying the Nazarene core values of holiness and missional.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter contains the major findings gained from this research project. This project's purpose arose from the problem of a lack of spiritual leaders in a particular ministry setting, which pointed to a discipleship problem in the local church. It was the intent of the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of discipleship in other Nazarene churches from the perspective of the pastors of these churches. The goal was to determine best discipleship practices in these churches that are helping lead people toward spiritual maturity, as well as to determine common and/or unique barriers to discipleship in these churches. This research was done with the hope of establishing the necessary groundwork for the development of a tool or tools that can help pastors and churches engage in the practice of discipleship more faithfully and effectively.

Major Findings

Findings that answered Research Question 1

The Personal/Relational Element

Discipleship in the Nazarene Church has been talked about for years as essentially synonymous with Sunday school. This is not surprising since for years the denomination has so heavily emphasized Sunday school as the primary form of discipleship. This equation has been a major barrier to helping people toward spiritual maturity. While not intentional, the emphasis on Sunday school has typically led people to the conclusion that discipleship is about attaining more biblical knowledge, which has made discipleship about cognitive development alone.

What has been discovered in recent years is that many believers have been attending Sunday school for years but have not necessarily grown into spiritually mature Christians. They know more Bible, but the heart and life transformation has not necessarily resulted for many believers. Many “older” Christians are not bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit to any further degree than when they did when they first believed. Many have grown old in their faith, but they have not necessarily grown up or matured in their faith. Many have stayed in spiritual infancy.

As this research surveyed 30 pastors and interviewed 16 of the 30, it was confirmed that this experience is very typical in many churches. This same conclusion was overwhelmingly articulated in most of the literature that was reviewed for this project. A few of the works specifically talked about how the belief that Sunday school equals discipleship has greatly contributed to the discipleship problem in the churches. Lawrence O. Richards in his work *Christian Education* speaks to the reality that Sunday school has narrowly focused on cognitive development of believers, but in order for discipleship to effectively help people grow spiritually, discipleship must be about holistic development of the person and discipleship must be done and taught as a way of life (77).

As many pastors articulated, discipleship is primarily about intentional relationships. Sunday school classes and small groups don’t make disciples. Rather, people make disciples. Intentional personal touch and relationships cannot be replaced by any kind of discipleship program. The personal touch of relationship is a key component to effective discipleship that cannot be missing.

Michael Henderson in *One Conversation at a Time* articulates the vital role of the personal touch of relationships in discipleship. Churches must move beyond thinking that if people attend Sunday school and small groups, discipleship will happen. The formation of relationships has to be a very intentional endeavor. Henderson suggests:

Most churches do not grow spiritually or numerically for two reasons: very church members take the initiative to assume responsibility for their friends' spiritual growth...Second, the "one another" requires small intimate associations to work – either small groups that stay together for an extended period of time together or one-to-one relationships. Not many churches know how to foster the productive little groupings. (128)

Henderson offers great insight when he suggests that even church members struggle to take initiative or responsibility for their friend's spiritual growth. As Henderson says, if it is struggle to watch out for one another that are friends, then it is especially a struggle to look out or care for those who are not even friends yet. Churches are filled with people who have not developed any solid friendships in churches. Perhaps one of the main reasons churches are struggling to do discipleship well is because churches struggle to do relationships well. Relationships too often stay superficial in churches. In many cases, the Sunday school environment unintentionally allows for superficial relationships to thrive. The natural result is superficial and shallow disciples.

In order for the churches to do discipleship well, which requires doing relationships well since discipleship is all about relationships, then it must constantly take its cues from the God who is a relational God. Pastors must not only take cues from God, but also model what God has modeled for them. He took on flesh and moved into the neighborhood and rubbed shoulders with others, and the Triune God befriended humanity. This God in the flesh is the Master Teacher who demonstrates how to make disciples by inviting people into a deep and intimate relationship with Himself. God

didn't invite people to Sunday school, as good and helpful as that might be. Perhaps He did invite humans to be a part of His small group, but at the core of what God did, He invited humans to know Him, to walk with Him, to watch Him, mimic Him, and to do as He does. Jesus demonstrated how to disciple people. It is relational, and it is deep, and it is intimate, and it is challenging. It is a way of life in relationship with another. By walking with Him, one becomes more and more like Him.

The church then must take up the practice of initiating intentional relationships of discipleship regardless of the venue where relationships begin. Mature disciples must be intentional at extending invitations to others on the journey of faith to join them in growing into Christlikeness. Mature Christians in all relational settings must embody honesty, transparency and vulnerability among many other things. Modeling the kind of intimacy that is desired and needed for all disciples to grow must happen at a grassroots level. Safe environments for relationships to go deeper require safe people who model the vulnerability and risk taking that is necessary if others are going to open up in the same ways. God became vulnerable, took a risk and opened himself up even to the possibility of suffering. While suffering is possible if one opens themselves up, genuine love and friendship is not only possible but most likely probable.

Christlikeness (spiritual maturity) is the Goal of Discipleship

As Stephen Rankin says in his book *Aiming at Maturity*, “the goal for every Christian should be to become spiritually mature-to become a grown-up disciple” (5). As this research project showed, Christlikeness was used in the majority of definitions of discipleship given by those interviewed. In some ways, this may be reflective of the Nazarene denominational emphasis on holiness as well as on the Nazarene

denominational mission statement, “to make Christlike disciples in the nations.” On the other hand, it was clear that the personal convictions of the pastors was that Christ desires to see people continually grow to be more and more like him.

While Research Question 1 asked the question of how do pastors of the district understand the definition and goal of discipleship, what was made clear in this research project is that the definition and goal of discipleship cannot be separated. The goal of discipleship was not simply implicit in how pastors defined discipleship; it was largely made explicit by most pastors in their definition. Discipleship is not Sunday school. Nor is it small groups or any other program. Discipleship is not strictly learning a body of content. Discipleship is a relationship in which people are growing more and more into the image of Christ.

Findings that answered Research Question 2

Serving

Serving in some form of ministry is important if followers of Christ are going to mature as disciples. However, serving does not necessarily equate to spiritual growth. Many church parishioners spend their lives fulfilling different ministry roles within the church, and yet they somehow remain stuck in spiritual infancy. Sometimes church parishioners who have been on several mission trips and experience God on these trips can still manage not to show much spiritual growth in their lives as a result of these trips. However, many examples show the opposite. Many who do regularly serve in and outside the walls of the church show significant spiritual growth.

Church activity does not necessarily equate to spiritual growth. Activism in the community does not necessarily equate to spiritual growth. However, being involved in

service both inside and outside the walls of the church is absolutely necessary if someone is going to mature spiritually.

The indicator of being engaged in serving was the most often repeated response from pastors that were interviewed when asked the question of “How do you know if people are growing spiritually?” Pastors repeatedly stated that they saw serving as foundational to the process of spiritual maturation. Many pastors talked about serving as the particular environment that is most conducive for spiritual growth, even more so than small groups, Sunday school, or corporate worship. Service opportunities are conducive for cultivating spiritual growth, and two pastors emphasized the fact that serving outside the walls of the church to “least of these” is where the Spirit is already at work. The conclusion of these two pastors was that serving in this way is at the heart of the mission of Christ. Since the Spirit is already at work there, when people join Christ in his work in these environments, they are positioning themselves for the Spirit to do a transformative work within them. The consensus of the pastoral interviews was succinctly stated by the pastor who said, “Serving Christ together teaches us a lot and we learn a lot. This is a key component to growth.”

The literature as a whole affirmed the significance of serving, but the literature did not come across as emphatic as the interviews did. Nevertheless, most of the authors within the literature pointed to serving as one of many key components to spiritual growth. For example, Stephen Rankin in his work *Aiming at Maturity* stated, “The call to grow to maturity is inseparable from the call to minister. Living the Christian life not only gets you and me into heaven. It puts us to work in God’s kingdom” (126).

From a different perspective on service, Richard Foster in his classic work, *Celebration of Discipline*, says, “The risen Christ beckons us to the ministry of the towel. Such a ministry, flowing out of the inner recesses of the heart, is life and joy and peace” (140). For Foster, service is one of the key spiritual disciplines that are important for cultivating spiritual growth. Foster speaks of serving from the biblical foundation of the example Jesus sets in washing his disciples’ feet. Jesus models service and humility and says to his disciples that they are to do as He has done.

As the other biblical foundations communicate, becoming like Christ is the goal of discipleship. If one is to attain to the status of the full measure of Christ as Ephesians 4 articulates, then he must learn to pattern his life after Christ. In Mark 10:45 (NIV), Jesus himself said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.” Jesus articulates His mission and reason for coming as service and offering his life up for the other. His service was “true service” to use Richard Foster’s words as opposed to self-righteous service. Foster says, “True service comes from a relationship with the Divine Other deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, diving urgings” (128). This true service that humanity is called to emulate is different from the self-righteous service that humanity is tempted to engage in. Self-righteous service says Foster is “impressed with the ‘big deal,’” “requires external rewards,” “is highly concerned about results,” “picks and chooses whom to serve,” “is affected by moods and whims,” “is temporary...insensitive” and “fractures community” (128-129).

To become like Christ requires service and humility. This humility of Christ is seen in the kenosis hymn of Philippians 2:5-11. It was modeled in a tangible way as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and it is reiterated in this hymn of self-emptying. The

call of humility and self-emptying is the call of having this same mind or attitude that was in Christ Jesus. Richard Foster notes the vital role of service with cultivating humility when he states, “More than any other single way, the grace of humility is worked into our lives through the Discipline of service” (128). Foster goes on to say, “Of all the classical Spiritual Disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility. When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is, for the most part, a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirits” (130).

Perhaps one of the main reasons that service has not led to spiritual maturity for so many parishioners who have been serving for years is because their service has not been the “true service” that is done in humility as Foster articulates. Perhaps too much of service is self-righteous service that does not arise out of the impulses of love that come from union with the Father. Perhaps service is happening not because the love of Christ compels it, but in order to receive accolades and rewards. As Foster says, “True service rests contented in hiddenness...the divine nod of approval is completely sufficient” (128).

What is clear from the data collected, the literature reviewed, and the biblical foundations is that service is in fact a key indicator and necessary environment to cultivating spiritual growth in the lives of disciples. Serving is a non-negotiable, but serving cannot be in isolation from the other corporate disciplines and practices of the community of faith. Without corporate worship, regular fellowship with the body of believers, and the intentional relationships of discipleship going on in the life of a believer, the temptations of self-righteous service will be hard to resist. True service must be modeled regularly for all who are followers of Christ.

Small groups

An emphasis on small groups has been a recent trend in church life. These groups go by lots of different names. Life Groups, Cell Groups, Home Groups, Grow Groups, Connect Groups, and Community Groups are just a few designations by various churches that were represented in this study. A move away from the traditional Sunday school model has been happening for a couple of decades in many churches. It has been this way in the Church of the Nazarene as well, although Sunday school still holds a significant place in most Nazarene churches in North American and around the world. While some churches have completely let go of the old model of Sunday school, most churches have simply added on small groups as an additional discipleship opportunity for parishioners to be engaged in rather than dropping Sunday school completely.

The researcher's church is one of the many that are offering both Sunday school and small groups. What was discovered in this research project was that the highest percentage of pastors surveyed suggested that small groups of 10-12 were the most fruitful environments for cultivating spiritual growth in their parishioners. While the question was not asked whether or not their churches offered small groups of this size, several interviews revealed that Sunday school was the only discipleship environment offered at their church, and thus some responded that it was the most fruitful because there were no alternatives. A parallel statement could be made that while a few pastors said that a one-on-one or one-on-two discipleship environment was most fruitful, many, if not most of the pastors did not offer this kind of discipleship environment in their church. Some pastors may also consider one-on-one and one-on-two as a very small group.

While Sunday school could be argued to be a very fruitful environment in various circumstances, it was echoed through the interviews that small groups were most fruitful. Why this is the case came out primarily in the interviews. Small groups by and large were described as more intimate settings that were conducive for honesty, openness, accountability, and encouragement. A couple of pastors communicated that their Sunday school classes provided these same kinds of settings, but the majority of pastors suggested small groups were much more effective than Sunday school classes in providing these types of settings. For most of the pastors surveyed and interviewed Sunday school was primarily focused on teaching biblical content and thus on cognitive and/or academic development of disciples.

On the other hand, small groups were described as more focused on relationship development and more in terms of journeying through life together with a group of people. Several pastors described small groups as places where accountability happens, which does not typically happen in a Sunday school environment. At the same time, a few pastors suggested that their Sunday school environment was not a traditional environment and for all practical purposes acted like a small group environment.

What the researcher has noticed since this project is that in his own context, small groups are much more effective at cultivating spiritual growth than Sunday school. There is growth happening in Sunday school, but it is harder to detect. Because time is so limited, relationships are hard to develop during a Sunday school hour that is only 50 minutes long and is preoccupied with teaching a particular lesson. From both a time standpoint and objective standpoint, Sunday school is much more limited than small groups meeting in homes to develop relationships that are key to the discipleship process.

By and large, the literature review confirmed the data that small groups are more effective than Sunday school at cultivating spiritual growth. While John Wesley did not know about the current debate of which environment is more effective, he did articulate that small groups were essential for spiritual growth. As Kevin Watson says in *A Blueprint for Discipleship*, “Small group accountability is the tread that ties all the pieces of Wesleyan discipleship together” (107). For Wesley, corporate worship (the society meeting) was vital for spiritual growth, but he knew in order for believers to keep growing and not drift back into the culture, they must be involved in a class meeting, which was a group of approximately 7-12 believers. Watson stated earlier, “This method of ‘watching over one another in love’ was the foundation, the bedrock, of Wesleyan discipleship...the first thing Wesley did was to place them (new believers) in small groups where they would be taught the basics of Christian faith and life and helped to grow in holiness” (106). The class meeting cannot be underestimated for Wesley’s vision for discipleship. Michael Henderson in his work *A Model for Making Disciples*, states:

The class meeting encapsulated several of the key principles of New Testament Christianity: personal growth within the context of an intimate fellowship, accountability for spiritual stewardship, ‘bearing one another’s burdens,’ and ‘speaking the truth in love.’ It serves now as a model for those who have accepted the command of Jesus to make disciples. (14)

For John Wesley, regular gatherings of believers in small groups where accountability happened were essential to making disciples. These environments with a limit on participants proved very fruitful and effective in cultivating spiritual growth in believers.

In *Discipleshift*, Putman and Harrington echo the importance of small groups especially in light of relationship development. Putman and Harrington share that one of the necessary shifts that the contemporary church must make if it is going to recover its

mission of making disciples is that it must shift from activity to relationships. They state, “Making disciples is the main reason why a church exists, so everything in a corporate body needs to funnel people toward a relational small group in which discipleship can best happen. While small groups are not the only ministry in the church, they are the primary means of making disciples who make disciples” (184). Small group environments for Putman and Harrington are hotbed environments for spiritual growth. They go on to suggest that authenticity and accountability are two key components to these relational small groups.

While the biblical foundations for small group ministry may be couched in the idea that most of the early churches were small groups of believers, there is something to say for the way that Jesus modeled discipleship. The number 12 has much more significance in scripture than being an optimum number for small group discipleship, but Jesus modeled a life changing and world changing way of doing relationships and ministry. He invested in a small group of men. Within the 12, he had an even more intimate group of three. The rationales for the inner group of 3 and only 12 disciples is not explained, but intimacy was a key component to the relationship that Jesus had with his disciples. Jesus modeled journeying together with a group of men. He shared life with them. He was authentic and vulnerable with them. He served them. He loved them. He challenged them. He encouraged them. He corrected them. He laid his life down for them. The disciples learned. They talked. They got it right sometimes. They got it wrong sometimes. They grew up and matured. They had setbacks and they had struggles. They argued together, but they all walked together. They journeyed together. They prayed together. They waited together. They watched over one another in love. They

encountered the risen Christ together and the pouring out of the Spirit together. They changed the world together. Life together with Christ at the center was what Jesus' small group was about. It should be what today's small groups are about as well.

What can be concluded is that small groups environments by and large are reported as being the most effective environments at cultivating spiritual growth. While other environments can and may be as effective in certain circumstances, one who is looking to improve his or her discipleship strategy and effectiveness will do well to invest in developing and/or improving a small group ministry. Small group ministry is not just a trend that will fade away. The church has been faithfully doing small group ministry for centuries and it is an essential component to the discipleship process in some form that is about more than teaching content and biblical knowledge.

Climate Matters

The surveys and interviews with the pastors confirmed the importance of small groups. The most frequent response of pastors surveyed was small groups of 10-12 people when asked, "which discipleship environment is most fruitful in cultivating spiritual growth in your parishioners?" What the interviews with pastors revealed was that a particular climate was what was most important for effective and fruitful discipleship to take place. Discipleship happens in a lot of different ways. Discipleship can happen during a conversation while driving, over the phone, in a restaurant, or on the mission field serving together. It happens in Sunday school classes and it happens in small groups. It happens and can happen in variety of ways and places. What makes discipleship effective is not necessarily the exact environment or method of discipleship the climate of that environment. Pastors voiced climate words like "safe," "honesty,"

“openness,” “vulnerability,” “transparency,” and “intimacy.” These climates pave the way for spiritual growth.

Many of those who are not small group advocates are usually not advocates because they did not experience the particular climate just described. Parishioners have said that they had a bad experience in a small group. They expressed that they were vulnerable and honest and then someone shared what they said outside the small group. Climates of trust and safety, honesty and transparency are vital in order for growth to take place. As pastors voiced these words, what became clear was the need for pastors to model this kind of behavior if they hope it to be embodied by their parishioners.

The literature that discussed discipleship environments echoed the importance of climate. On the topic of vulnerability in particular, Kevin Watson said, “A willingness to be vulnerable is also necessary for a successful group, as a class meeting will only go as far as the members in the group are willing to let the Spirit take them” (The Class Meeting, 135). Putnam and Harrington in a similar fashion state, “A small group is where authenticity and accountability are encouraged and modeled” (191). For Watson, Putnam, and Harrington, the particular climate of vulnerability, authenticity, and accountability is foundational for spiritual growth.

The biblical foundation for the importance of climate as articulated in this research project would emphasize the foundation of love for the other. Jesus’ call to be perfect or mature is in the context of rightly loving others, including the love of our enemies. Jesus’ command to his disciples to love one another as he has loved them is the precedent for the climate that is desired for followers of Christ. As Ephesians 4:15 says, disciples are called to speak truth in love and the result will be that all will grow up in

every way into Christ who is the head of the church. In Romans 12:10, Paul articulates the climate of love for the body of Christ. In order for a climate of trust, vulnerability, transparency, honesty and intimacy to happen, a genuine love for the other must be in place.

Pastoral Education and Longevity

The surveys pointed to a significant connection between pastoral education and discipleship as well as pastoral longevity and discipleship. In terms of pastoral longevity, pastors who had been pastoring for longer than 10 years versus those who have been pastoring less than 10 years consistently evaluated their congregations as having higher percentages of spiritual infants. What was communicated through the statistical analysis was that there is significant chance that those who have been involved in pastoral ministry for at least ten years are either more skeptical or more realistic about the state of discipleship than those who have been in pastoral ministry for less than ten years.

In terms of education, pastors with either a doctorate degree or only having completed the course of study for the denomination were almost exclusively small group advocates with none suggesting that Sunday school was the most fruitful environment in helping people grow spiritually. The majority of pastors who had a bachelor's or master's degree were almost evenly split between small groups and Sunday school as to which environment was most fruitful in helping people grow spiritually. Also, pastors with a doctorate degree or only having completed the course of study almost exclusively affirmed that they utilize practices or programs that help disciples know how to make other disciples. On the other hand, two-thirds of the pastors with a bachelor's or master's

degree said that they do not utilize any practices or programs to help disciples know how to make other disciples.

In some ways, the interviews corroborated these findings of the statistical analysis, however there were a few exceptions throughout. All the pastors I interviewed had at least a bachelor's degree or higher. Those I interviewed who had been in ministry for longer than ten years did come across as a little more realistic in the assessment and evaluation of how discipleship was going in their current setting.

The literature that was reviewed for this research project did not touch on the components of pastoral longevity (defined primarily as total years of pastoral ministry, although longevity in a setting did yield significance as well) and education and their potential impact on the effectiveness of discipleship. Likewise, there were not necessarily any biblical foundations for these two issues of why longevity and education might correlate with the assessment and practice of discipleship in the local church. However, education is certainly valued by the Apostle Paul who was well trained as a Pharisee of Pharisees.

Findings that answered Research Question 3

The Barriers of Desire and Cultural Influences

Before this research project, the lack of desire to grow was the most common barrier to growth observed in many parishioners. Complacency, apathy, or a combination were appropriate descriptors of many people in the researcher's current and previous ministry settings. A lack of hunger for God and his ways was evident. Upon collecting the data for this project, the lack of desire was the most frequent barrier selected by the 30 pastors who completed the survey. The next significant barrier was the barrier of time.

For the majority of responses, lack of desire to grow and a lack of time were the two most significant barriers according to the survey.

During personal interviews with 16 of 30 pastors surveyed, the answer of the most significant barrier became much more nuanced. Lack of desire or hunger was still mentioned regularly, but what became apparent from the interviews were the many cultural influences that have had a dramatic effect on our parishioners. Several pastors mentioned the consumerism of the culture as being a significant barrier to helping people grow spiritually. Individualism was mentioned along the same lines. Politics, money, and sports were all mentioned as well. One pastor described sports as “The Great Sports God.”

After these interviews and surveys were collected, it became evident that while there exists a lack of desire to grow spiritually, there is a correlation to a strong desire for what the cultural influences offer. The data, especially from the interviews, made clear that people do not necessarily lack a desire to grow spiritually; they just desire other things even more. From a different perspective, the data also showed that most churches do not have a clear path for being disciplined. Lack of a clear path of discipleship in churches in addition to other desires of the heart may only make things more difficult for the church to gain or regain the desire of people. The cultural influences offer a variety of gods that are seductive and appealing, and the problem of many parishioners in the North American context is that they are steeped in a religious syncretism of worshiping many gods. They desire Jesus, but they desire more than Jesus, or perhaps more accurately less than Jesus. Too many people and perhaps too many pastors desire to worship the multiple gods the culture offers. None would dare say they do not want Jesus, but to really mean

that “they would rather have Jesus than anything,” as one hymn so succinctly states, would perhaps be a difficult thing for most followers of Christ to affirm with their actions.

The lull of other gods is so seductive that many are full embracers of syncretistic worship, and there is never even an awareness that it has happened. No one likes to be accused of idolatry in this day and age, and even if one could make an argument that most people struggle with idolatry, the antidote is surely intentional relationships with spiritually mature disciples who can pull them back out of being conformed to the patterns of this consumeristic, individualistic culture.

The literature pointed to the reality that most people have not been disciplined well in the churches in North America. In some ways, the literature pointed more to why there might be a lack of desire of parishioners to grow spiritually in that churches have not made growing spiritually an essential part of what they do. In other words, the lack of desire certainly can be attributed in some ways to cultural influences of the world, but the literature also pointed to the reality that the church has made it too easy for the culture to have such an influence. The church has not done well in offering an alternative way of life than what the culture is regularly offering. Greg Ogden in his book *Transforming Discipleship* says that one of the main reasons for the low estate of discipleship in the churches “is that pastors have been diverted from their primary calling to ‘equip the saints for the work of ministry’” (40). Ogden’s point is that churches and pastors have allowed the role of the pastor to become first and foremost program developers, administrators, and caregivers. In particular, pastoral care has become one of the main expectations, which in some ways has fed into the consumer culture mindset of what

parishioners want from their pastors. Discipleship becomes secondary at best in a situation like this, and pastors find themselves with little to no time to actually disciple and equip people.

Ogden points to another reason for the low estate of discipleship when he says, “we have reduced the Christian life to the eternal benefits we get from Jesus rather than living as students of Jesus” (46). Once again, this points to the desire issue in that church for far too long has wrongly proclaimed the gospel message in terms of “what’s in it for those who would believe.” In other words, the church has in many ways preached an incomplete gospel that fed into the consumer culture of the world. If many parishioners have reduced the Christian life to the eternal benefits they get from believing in Jesus, then they have already gotten what they have desired when they converted. They have been taught to desire heaven and have met the necessary requirements, so there is no need to desire anything beyond the benefits they have already received. As one pastor articulated, “we have made the gospel sound as if following Jesus does not cost us anything.” If many parishioners are showing a lack of desire to grow spiritually, they certainly would lack a desire to reproduce and make other disciples.

When thinking of the biblical and theological framework for this project, the barriers of desire and cultural influences are discussed implicitly in many of the passages that were cited in the biblical foundations section of this project. The final passage referenced in the biblical foundations section is Galatians 5:23. Discipleship leads towards Christlikeness and the fruit of the Spirit gives great descriptors of what Christlikeness looks like lived out. Paul gives the fruit of the Spirit in direct contrast to the works of the flesh. Paul has a deep awareness that the desires of the flesh are still a

force to be aware of and reckoned with. Followers of Christ feel the tension of the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit. In Galatians, as in most of Paul's letters, there are numerous admonitions and exhortations about living according to the Spirit and setting the mind on the things of the Spirit and not on flesh. If most parishioners are similar to the parishioners in the churches that Paul wrote letters to, then it may not be surprising to see the reality that there is a fierce battle of desire going on in the hearts and minds of many if not most of our people.

What Paul urges people on to is maturity in Christ in Ephesians 4. The author of Hebrews urges people to desire and crave to move beyond spiritual infancy. Jesus calls his disciples and the crowds to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. It is the same word used for mature and complete in other contexts in Hebrews and in Paul's letters. Thus, Jesus is urging everyone in the midst of the struggle of desires to allow the desire to be like his heavenly Father to win out. Paul urges in Romans to no longer be conformed to the patterns of this world but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Paul reminds listeners in Romans and in Galatians that they no longer live according the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Stuck in Infancy

The previous topic of desire is closely related to the topic of spiritual infancy. One could argue from the scriptural lens that the reason followers of Christ remain in spiritual infancy is because they do not have the desire to grow. They have allowed themselves to be content with the elementary teachings of the faith, as the author of Hebrews would say. The researcher had observed a high level of spiritual infancy in his church as well as a lack of spiritual leadership. Part of the point of this project was to discover whetehr this

was a typical situation and if so, what were the causes of this and what was being done to address and overcome these situations.

The data from this this project shows that the majority of churches that participated are in a similar state with a few exceptions. Most parishioners are in spiritual infancy. The majority has not moved into maturity. The majority are not embodying the Church of the Nazarene core values of holiness and missional. These core values could be summed up in the one term “Christlikeness,” the goal and aim of discipleship. So once again, the discipleship problem surfaced. Most churches are struggling to help move people from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity.

The literature certainly confirmed this reality, and the explanations parallel those of the topics of desire and cultural influences. Once again, the literature put more emphasis on the church’s failure to do discipleship well than on the desire of individual believers to grow. As Greg Ogden says, “most churches have no clear, public pathway to maturity” (Transforming Discipleship, 52). Not only is this a problem, but as the interviews and surveys made clear, most of the pastors are not even measuring spiritual growth either because they do not feel that they can measure it, or they do not know how to effectively measure it. Ironically, the majority observed that the majority of their parishioners are in spiritual infancy. Thus, pastors are measuring something. Pastors have in mind what spiritual maturity looks like, and the Church of the Nazarene describes what maturity looks like in the two core values of holiness and missional. Perhaps the Church of the Nazarene struggles with Ogden’s assessment that even though it has the goal of maturity stated and described, it is just not effective at getting people to that goal.

The author of Hebrews and Paul make it abundantly clear that spiritual infancy is a problem in the early church. While they don't necessarily offer up reasons for why people are stuck in infancy, it may be implicitly revealed through the antidotes that are offered. Paul and the author of Hebrews use mostly plurals when addressing the topic of spiritual infancy, meaning they are addressing the corporate body of believers together. In Ephesians 3, when Paul prays, "that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God," he is using the plural for "you." His argument continues in Ephesians 4:13-15 when he says:

Until **we** all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then **we** will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves...Instead, speaking the truth in love, **we** will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

The potential problem behind spiritual infancy in a passage like this may be that followers of Christ forget the importance of the corporate dynamic of faith. Spiritual infants need spiritual adults to care for them and help them take the necessary steps in order to keep growing. There must be intentional relationship investments made and initiated. If the metaphor of spiritual infants is accurate in relational terms, the burden for taking the initiative for growth falls on the spiritually mature adults to enter into relationship and invite spiritual infants to grow, which requires heavy time investments from the spiritually mature.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

One of the first ministry implications of the findings is to take a moment to breathe and pray as pastors and churches and commit to asking God for guidance. This is

not simply lip service to prayer; the interviews with pastors show how busy they are with so many other tasks that most felt a little guilty that when they thought about discipleship. They responded with a lot of grunts, sighing, and groaning over the fact that things weren't going very well. Some were hopeful and optimistic, but the vast majority was simply overwhelmed with the awareness of this needing to be more of a priority.

A second implication is that pastors need to realize how important it is to help people work towards developing healthy relationships. If discipleship is understood to be primarily about a relationship with someone, then the church must work towards helping people know what healthy relationships look like and how they function. Then, when discipleship relationship opportunities arise, the groundwork of a great relationship already exists. In fact, the groundwork must be there if people are even going to want to desire a discipleship relationship.

A third implication is for pastors to realize they have their work cut out for them in helping their people combat the cultural influences that constantly bombard them during the week. Sermons help do this, but once again, intentional relational time forms spiritually mature people. Investing in those who are spiritual infants is going to play a crucial role in helping people keep their eyes fixed on the author and perfecter of our faith. Pastors must be patient in knowing that many of their people are in the midst of feeling the ongoing struggles of desire within them. The desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit are both at work, so pastors must be aware of the struggles but have reason to be hopeful as well.

A fourth implication is that pastors must remember that their primary call is to equip the saints to do the ministry of the church. Pastors are busy doing so many things

that intentionally discipling people is on the back burner for too many, thinking, “We don’t have time for those kinds of relationships.” If the church fails to equip its people to know how to make other disciples, then churches will continue to struggle with making other disciples. It has to be a priority for the church. It has to be a priority for the pastors.

A fifth ministry implication is that pastors must not underestimate the importance of their ministry experience. More specifically, pastoral longevity in terms of years of experience and in terms of staying in a local setting for a longer period of time helps pastors and congregations establish fruitful discipleship environments. Effectiveness in helping people grow spiritually takes time and intentional relationships. The longer pastors are in ministry, the more realistic they tend to become of how difficult the discipleship task is of actually helping people grow in Christlikeness. So many barriers and obstacles to growth exist that it takes a lot of discernment to help people take the next steps of spiritual growth. The more realistic pastors become of the state of discipleship and how difficult it is to help people grow, the more likely they are to take the necessary steps of developing and creating the kinds of discipleship environments that are proving to be fruitful in helping people grow spiritually.

A sixth ministry implication is that pastors must not underestimate how much their education shapes their practice of ministry. No pastor interviewed would doubt how important ministerial education is, but what was clear from the survey results was that the majority of those who had a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree did not do anything in their ministry settings to help disciples know how to make other disciples. There could be a lot of reasons for the why to this finding, but much of the ministerial education on the task of discipleship puts most emphasis on making sure people have good theology and can

arrive at good interpretations of scripture. Too many pastors have been content with people being academically developed and when that happens feeling that they have been disciplined well. However, whether or not those who have been disciplined turn around and participate in the Great Commission and make other disciples has largely become irrelevant for many or secondary at best to what is meant by discipleship. Largely, ministerial education in many ways has neglected to teach the importance of this component to discipleship.

A final ministry implication is that pastors must get their people serving, especially outside the four walls of the church. The Holy Spirit is alive and well, working in the world, in neighborhoods, and in communities. People are invited to join God in the work that He is doing all around them. When people are helping the least of these, they are at the center of Christ's ministry and mission. Through serving in such ways, they are being spiritually formed and transformed in ways that will not happen sitting in a small group, greeting at the front door, or being in a worship service. There is something powerful about serving. Therefore, churches must provide opportunities for people to serve because many of them will not serve alone but they would be willing to do it with a group of people.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this study. One must consider that the sample size of participants in this research project was minimal. A larger sample for both the surveys and the interviews would be helpful in increasing the validity of the research results. Also, the participants were all males, all Nazarenes, and predominantly white. More intentionality on increasing the diversity of participants would be beneficial in

generalizing this study. The denominational distinctive is helpful for comparison purposes with other denominations or comparison with other Nazarene districts, but diversity of denominations would also help with generalizing this study.

Unexpected Observations

Several unexpected observations were made throughout this research project. Service was not expected to be voiced so frequently and extensively as it was when asking about key indicators of how to know if someone is growing spiritually. Every pastor interviewed voiced serving in some way. There was not expected to be significant correlations between pastoral longevity and discipleship or education and discipleship. While it is unclear what all the correlations might mean, it certainly points to the fact that other demographics might have a significant role in the practice and effectiveness of discipleship. Perhaps one meaning in regard to the topic of pastoral longevity is that effectiveness in discipleship can dramatically increase when pastors have spent enough time building trust with a particular people. Since a pastoral/congregational relationship takes time, trust takes time to build. Once trust is built, the potential for intimacy in discipleship settings and willingness to participate in discipleship settings increases dramatically. A potential meaning of the educational component is that the Nazarene course of study and doctoral of ministry programs that pastors in this research project have participated in specifically have an emphasis on the importance of disciples making disciples that many bachelor's and master's degrees do not. Good theology, good interpretation of scripture, good Bible knowledge, and good pastoral care would be the most significant things pushed between these two degrees. The Nazarene pastors who participated in this research project are by and large a product of the same institutions

that shaped the researcher. Learning how to really disciple people beyond teaching people Bible and good theology was not emphasized.

Unexpectedly, many different barriers voiced. There was quite a bit of crossover on stated barriers from pastors, but there were also very unique perspectives. While the surveys kept the barriers to a few specific ones, the interviews brought out all kinds of different nuances to what barriers there are to why they think they are barriers.

Many of the pastors also expressed how much they appreciated the time together just talking about the topic of discipleship. Several pastors said at the end of the interview that they would love to meet up again soon for lunch and conversation. Many pastors are also longing for safe friendships and authentic relationships, something that is sometimes difficult to have due to the nature of the title and role in churches as pastors.

Future Directions for the Study

There are several potential future directions for this study. There is much work that could be done in delving deeper into analysis as it pertains to identifying how many discipleship environments are offered by churches and then determining which environment is the most fruitful of all those environments offered by a particular church. The question on the survey about which discipleship environment do you see as most fruitful in helping people grow spiritually did not take into consideration that not all the churches offer all of the environment options listed. Some pastors suggested that they only offer Sunday school and because that is all that they offer in terms of discipleship, it meant that it would be selected as the most fruitful, although one pastor suggested in the other category in a comment box on the survey that all they offer is Sunday school, but he suggested that he would not call it fruitful.

There is future research to be done on the significant indicator of serving as a sign of people growing spiritually. Specifically, there should be research into what it is about serving that is so transformational and how churches can help people develop hearts of “true service” rather than hearts of “self-righteous service” that Richard Foster describes in *Celebration of Discipline*. Research can help determine whether serving within the four walls of the church is adequate or if there something unique about serving outside the four walls that helps people grow spiritually in ways that serving within the four walls of the church cannot. Determining which kind of service is more helpful in cultivating spiritual growth is important.

Another potential direction for future study is on the correlation between the idea that discipleship may not be going well in churches because people are not good at doing relationships well in churches. If discipleship is first and foremost about relationships, and the culture and churches are plagued by a lot of unhealthiness in relationships, perhaps there is key conversation that needs to be had between the discipleship relationship and professional therapy and counseling. Perhaps the book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* naturally paves the way for a study on Emotionally Healthy Discipleship. Emotional health is important for relationships to be healthy and beneficial, and the discipleship relationship is a very important relationship.

Review of the Chapter

This chapter has compared the major findings of this research project with the observations and experience of the researcher in discipleship, the many voices of the literature reviewed, and the biblical and theological foundations of the goal of discipleship. Limitations to the study were offered with a few brief recommendations of

how the study could be generalized. Finally, reflections on the major findings have been given as well as a few offerings of potential future directions of study that this project points to.

Postscript

This journey has been enriching in so many ways. I have been passionate about evangelism and discipleship since I was a teenager. I love to talk about Jesus. I developed a love for scripture when I was in college, and I found that I love to teach scripture and theology. I have always liked to talk about faith with people of other religious traditions. I have always wondered why the whole world would not want to follow Jesus. When I first picked my dissertation topic, it was on evangelism. I wanted to know why there was such a lack of evangelism training happening in the local church and why was the church not helping people know how to share the good news in an ever-increasing melting pot in which the mission field has moved to us in the United States. I began research on the topic of evangelism only to realize that the reason there is a lack of evangelism training and a lack of people sharing their faith is because we have a discipleship problem in the church. Evangelism defined specifically as sharing one's faith about how the good news of Jesus Christ has changed one's life was an outflow of the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Evangelism flows out of the life of a disciple and if it is not flowing out, then there is a discipleship problem.

This project was about better diagnosing the problem so that the church can better figure out how to overcome the problem, which to my delight I discovered that several churches have been doing. They are doing some great things that have addressed the discipleship problem. We collectively as the church are to blame for much of the

problem, and we collectively as the church must work together to overcome the barriers that we face. We can and must learn from one another, and we must be realistic in our assessment of where we are so that we can move forward in overcoming the barriers we face.

As I began this journey, I was grieving that so many of my own parishioners were spiritual infants. I was frustrated and angry that the church and many other churches have produced this outcome. I was frustrated that people were not further along in their journey after years of going to church. God got a hold me one day and helped me to see that my people were sheep who needed a shepherd. I could spend my time whining and complaining and wondering about they whys and the hows, or I could stop and channel my frustration into compassion for my people. So my prayer for the past two years has been, “Lord, turn my frustration into compassion.” God has been answering that prayer, and I find myself needing to keep praying that prayer.

God got a hold of me again shortly after this prayer and impressed upon my heart and mind this message: “Tony, you talk about discipleship and talk about wanting your people to make disciples, but who are you discipling?” I cannot believe it took me two years to realize that I am going to have to model what I am wanting to see in my people. This takes time. I started advocating small groups and we launched small groups because I believe people need to be in small groups if they are going to grow. Four months later, I began discipling two women on Tuesday mornings once a week and two men on Wednesday afternoons once a week. We have all been meeting for a little over a year now. Two of the four have already begun discipling others as well.

All of this has happened simultaneously with working on my research project. The surveys and interviews from this research project have been so helpful for me personally as I think I have a better grasp on the problem as well as some good practices and ideas gained from other pastors in the trenches. This process has reminded me of the incredible gift of the good news of Jesus Christ and has only added fuel to the fire that is in me to continue to be about the Great Commission.

Discipleship is about relationships. Many of the people sitting in our pews or who are showing up to our church activities are longing for authentic relationships with people who love the Lord and are spiritually mature. They are busy. They have other desires that compete with their desire for spiritual things, but, like every other human being, they long for healthy and genuine relationships. Authentic relationships take time and intentional effort. Discipleship relationships take intentional effort and initiative on the part of the spiritually mature to invite those less mature into relationship with them. This is the only way to lead people into maturity who know how to lead others into maturity, or better yet, into Christlikeness.

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Letter for Semi-Structured Interviews

10/10/2016

Dear _____,

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of discipleship in the local church. You have already had the opportunity to take part in the first step of the research project by filling out the survey on discipleship that was sent by me to all the Nazarene pastors in Middle Tennessee. As an additional part of my research, I would like to interview 15-20 fellow pastors about discipleship in their specific contexts. As such, you are invited to assist in this study. Your participation would be greatly valued and appreciated.

My hope is that through this research I will be able to assist pastors and congregations on our district with better understanding some effective practices of discipleship as well as understanding the common barriers of discipleship that we all face. In order to identify what is working well in churches and what is not working well in churches, your participation in this study is pivotal. Through your participation, I am hopeful that our churches will be helped and better equipped as we seek how to best engage in discipleship in our current contexts.

The interview will not take place in a public place, and the responses and data collected from the interview will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person or church. Upon the completion of the research

The information gained from the interviews in either electronic form or handwritten form will be kept for 6-12 months after graduation. At that point, all data in electronic form will be deleted and all data in handwritten or hardcopy form will be shredded.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions in the interview. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of this study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My cell number is 615-394-0578 and my email is tonysparrow@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

Tony Sparrow

I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

Your signature:

Date: _____

Please print your
name: _____

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How do you define discipleship?
2. How would you describe the state of discipleship in our denomination?
3. How would you describe the state of discipleship in your current ministry setting?
To whatever degree the state of discipleship in your church is different from the denomination, what are the reasons for the differences and/or similarities?
4. In your current ministry setting, which discipleship environments do you feel are most effective in cultivating spiritual growth? What is it about these environments that make them so effective? What strategy/strategies do you have in place to help people get into these environments?
5. In your current ministry setting, how do you measure spiritual growth in your parishioners? Do you have any suggestions of how our denomination can better measure spiritual growth?
6. As Nazarenes, we state in our article of faith on entire sanctification that there is a distinction between a pure heart and a mature character. How do you help cultivate a pure heart in disciples? And then, what practices do you utilize to help people grow beyond a "pure heart" to maturity of character?
7. In your current ministry setting, what discipleship practices are you currently utilizing that help people better embody the core value of missional?
8. In your current ministry setting, what discipleship practices are you utilizing that help people know how to make other disciples?
9. What do you see as the biggest challenge to North American Nazarene pastors in accomplishing our mission of "making Christlike disciples in the nations"?
10. Are there any questions that I haven't asked that you think are essential to improving the way we go about discipleship as Nazarenes?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Letter for the Survey (took the form of a formed consent yes or no question on Survey Monkey)

10.03.2016

Dear _____,

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary and I am conducting research on the topic of discipleship in the local church. As a fellow pastor on this district, I would like to survey other pastors from as many churches in Middle Tennessee on the MidSouth District Church of the Nazarene as possible. As such, you are invited to assist in this study. Your participation would be greatly valued and appreciated.

My hope is that through this research I will be able to identify effective practices of discipleship being done in local churches as well as identify the common barriers to discipleship with the hope of working towards improving discipleship within our denomination. In order to identify what is working well in churches and what is not working well in churches, your participation in this study is pivotal. Through your participation, I am hopeful that our churches will gain a better understanding of how to work towards accomplishing the mission of our denomination: To make Christ-like disciples in the nations.

I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. I do not want to jeopardize your relationships in your church, so I will not ask for your name on the survey. The data will be collected using a code and all of the surveys will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person or church.

The information gained from the surveys will be kept for 6-12 months after graduation. At that point, all hard copies of data from the surveys will be shredded and any digital copies of the surveys will be deleted.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions on the survey. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of this study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information. My cell number is 615-394-0578 and my email is tonysparrow@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

Tony Sparrow

I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

Your signature: _____ Date: _____

Please print your name: _____

APPENDIX D

Survey (emailed out via Survey Monkey)Top of Form

1. Do you agree to the above terms? By clicking yes, you consent that you are willing to answer the questions in this survey.
2. How would you describe your church setting?
 - a. Rural or farming community
 - b. Urban/inner city
 - c. Suburban
 - d. If other, please describe here:_____
3. What is the size of your congregation (average Sunday worship attendance)?
 - a. 0-50
 - b. 51-100
 - c. 101-200
 - d. 201-400
 - e. 401-600
 - f. Over 600
4. How long have you been in pastoral ministry?
 - a. 0-1 years
 - b. 2-4 years
 - c. 5-9 years
 - d. 10 + years

5. How long have you pastored at your current church?

- a. 0-1 years
- b. 2-4 years
- c. 5-9 years
- d. 10 + years

6. Describe your highest level of ministerial education.

- a. Nazarene (or other denomination) Course of Study.
- b. Bachelor's Degree.
- c. Master's Degree.
- d. Doctoral Degree.
- e. Other: _____

7. One definition of discipleship is the following: "Discipleship is the process by which the church (corporately and individually) teaches and leads others to grow in Christlikeness." Would you consider this an acceptable working definition of discipleship?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. yes, but it could be better and this is how: _____
- d. No. Here are the reasons I think this definition is inadequate:

8. In your current ministry setting, which of the following discipleship environments is the most fruitful in helping people grow spiritually?

- a. Sunday school
- b. Small groups of approximately 10-12 people
- c. Smaller accountability groups of approximately 3-4 people
- d. One-on-one discipleship
- e. Other:_____

9. In regard to the discipleship environment selected above in question 8, how long has your church been offering this environment (or program)?

- a. 0-1 years
- b. 2-4 years
- c. 5-9 years
- d. 10-20 years
- e. 20+ years
- f. not sure

10. Which barrier below is the most significant barrier that you face in your current setting in helping people grow spiritually?

- a. Lack of spiritual leaders in my church.
- b. Lack of time of parishioners to engage in discipleship.
- c. Lack of desire of parishioners to engage in discipleship.
- d. Lack of other pastoral staff to help me in this area of ministry.
- e. Lack of knowledge in knowing how to disciple others.
- f. Lack of strong discipleship curriculum resources.
- g. Other: _____

11. Do you utilize any tools for measuring spiritual growth in others?

- a. yes
- b. no

12. If you answered yes to question #11, briefly describe that tool (or methodology) here:

13. Are there specific practices or programs that your church utilizes to help disciples know how to make other disciples?

- a. yes
- b. no

14. If you answered yes to question #13 above, briefly describe that practice (or program/methodology) here:

15. Are there specific practices and programs that your church utilizes to develop spiritual leaders (those who help others move from where they are spiritually to where God wants them to be)?

a. yes

b. no

16. If you answered yes to question #15 above, briefly describe that practice (program/or methodology) here:

17. In scripture, the apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews allude to both spiritual infancy (characterized by ignorance and/or self-centeredness) and spiritual maturity (characterized by God-centeredness and other-centeredness), and they imply that helping people to maturity is what we should be about in discipleship. They also imply that there is sometimes the problem of believers not growing out of spiritual infancy. What percentage of your parishioners would you consider are spiritually mature?

a. 0-20%

b. 21-40%

c. 41-60%

d. 61-80%

e. 81-100%

18. What percentage of your parishioners would you consider are in spiritual infancy?

- a. 0-20%
- b. 21-40%
- c. 41-60%
- d. 61-80%
- e. 81-100%

19. What percentage of your parishioners would you say are making other disciples?

- a. 0-20%
- b. 21-40%
- c. 41-60%
- d. 61-80%
- e. 81-100%

20. What percentage of your parishioners would you say embody the Nazarene core value of holiness (Christlikeness)?

- a. 0-20%
- b. 21-40%
- c. 41-60%
- d. 61-80%
- e. 81-100%

21. What percentage of your parishioners would you say embody the Nazarene core value of missional?

- a. 0-20%
- b. 21-40%
- c. 41-60%
- d. 61-80%
- e. 81-100%

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